JULY

Weird Tales

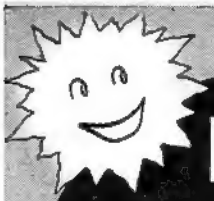
25¢

Strange footprints, other than human, had appeared on the floor of the cave!

"The House in the Valley"

By

AUGUST DERLETH



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IT REMEMBERS • IT TELLS TIME • IT TELLS DATE

MEASURES SPEED — MEASURES DISTANCE — RECORDS UP TO 12 HOURS — OVER 40 QUALITY FEATURES!

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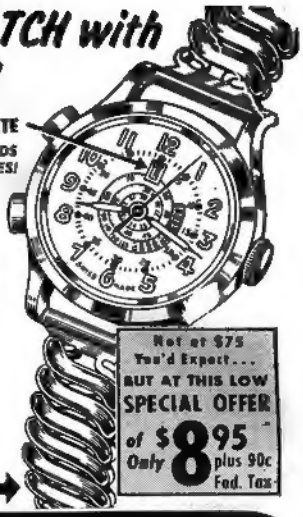

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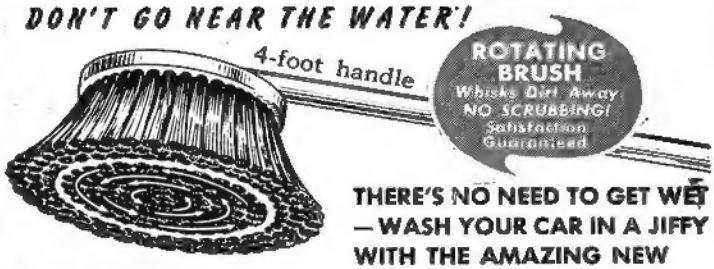
Put FLY KING on your porch or in your yard to lure, trap and KILL flies by the thousands *before* they get indoors. Deadly to disease-carrying, pesky flies, but 100% safe for you and your family. Enjoy Spring and Summer like never before! Say goodbye to fly-chasing and swatting. Fly King fits any Mason Jar. Order today, and get a full season's benefit.

DON'T GO NEAR THE WATER!

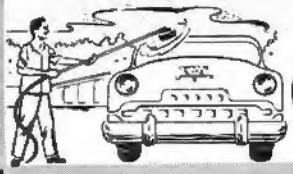


THERE'S NO NEED TO GET WET — WASH YOUR CAR IN A JIFFY WITH THE AMAZING NEW

WHIRLAWAY

JET PROPELLED

CAR WASHER



STOP spending money on car washes! Just attach the Modern NEW WHIRLAWAY to your garden hose — Simply guide the Whirlaway over the car and watch the dirt whirl away. No splash — No work! 4-foot aluminum handle with water regular and shut-off. Fully rust-proof. Jet propelled brush whisks away dirt, dust, road haze — without soaps or cleansers. Finest horsehair brush — will not scratch car finish. Whirlaway pays for itself over and over. RUSH ORDER NOW **$4.95**

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Rush items checked. If not delighted, I may return my order within 10 days for full refund of purchase price.

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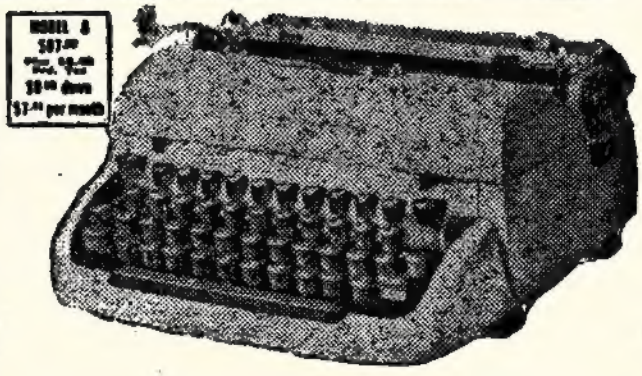
EARN $20, $30, $40 and more each week at home in your spare time with your typewriter.



This Booklet "How To Earn Money At Home In Your Spare Time On Your Portable Typewriter" will be included with your typewriter. Many people are now earning money at home addressing envelopes, typing menus, etc., etc. This booklet shows how to get that kind of work, what to charge, etc.

YES only $9.98 delivers the ALL-NEW factory sealed Remington Typewriter to your home, carrying case included. The balance of only $7.44 per month makes it very little to pay. The total price is only $87.50 plus $5.48 Fed. tax. It makes a wonderful gift for the boy or girl in high school or college—typed work usually gets better school marks. Makes it easy for dad to carry on his business trips. When you type on a Remington Portable the entire writing line is visible. Make money at home with it in your spare time (Booklet sent with typewriter shows how easy it can be done!). Each typewriter carries a factory warranty. An amazing ALL-NEW personal typewriter.

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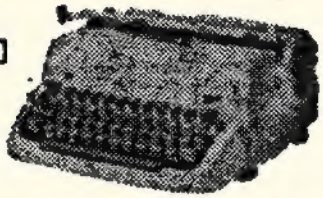
NOW, only $9.98 DELIVERS THE AMAZING NEW REMINGTON QUIET-RITER PORTABLE, balance only $8.32 per month, (PRICE $97.50 plus $6.08 tax), carrying case included.



The ONLY office typewriter in personal size. It's years ahead in styling, in construction, and in features. Has amazing "miracle tab," gives positive tabular stop control, with a stop for every space on the machine—and a simplified ribbon changer, and finger fitted keys.

Order this Remington Quiet-riter, factory sealed in carrying case, today.

This smartly styled carrying case is included at no extra charge with both models.

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☐ I enclose $9.98 send the "ALL NEW" Remington Portable. I will make monthly payments of $7.44. Include booklet on "How To Earn Money At Home" and carrying case. I understand this is a factory sealed typewriter with a factory warranty.

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Name .....

Address .....

City ..... Zone.... State.....

Note: You may send full price if you wish.

Weird Tales

JULY, 1953 Cover by W. H. Silvey

THE EYRIE 6

L'AFFAIRE VERENEKIN . . . . . David Eynon 9

The colonel had a theory—that the beauty of dying young is that one doesn't have to face one's mistakes.

THE HOUSE IN THE VALLEY (A novelette) . . . . . August Derleth 12

It is not commonly believed that the mind can duplicate in a dream state any experience which is utterly alien to it; this I had done.

HOUSE OF LIFE (Verse) . . . . . Dorothy Quick 29

SLAUGHTER HOUSE (A novelette) . . . . . Richard Matheson 30

There had been rumors of ghosts about the old place, but neither of the brothers could credit that sort of thing.

THE SOURCE OF IT . . . . . Glen Malin 51

If only I knew the source of this evil on earth. It has spread malignantly to nearly all the people and is fishing for me at this very moment. . . .

THE MISSING ROOM . . . . . Lyn Venable 58

Just like any other young couple looking over a house they'd love to own; how could they know it encompassed a secret room?

ON THE ELEVATOR . . . . . Joseph Payne Brennan 62

The storm-tossed waves beat against the boardwalk and the very foundations of the hotel itself. Was it they that churned up a secret long meant to lie buried at sea?

DREAD SUMMONS . . . . . Paul Ernst 67

The old butler heard a scream; but it was muffled by street noises outside the deserted and ghostly old house.

(Copyright 1937 by Popular Fiction Publishing Company)

THE SEA WITCH (A novelette) . . . . . Nictzin Dyalis 73

. . . One and all they turned their dead eyes on me with a curious fixity.

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Published bi-monthly by WEIRD TALES, 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20, N. Y. Reentered as second-class matter January 26, 1940, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under the Act of March 3, 1879. Single copies, 25 cents. *Subscription rates:* One year in the United States and possessions, $1.50. Foreign and Canadian postage extra. The publishers are not responsible for the loss of unsolicited manuscripts although every care will be taken of such material while in their possession.

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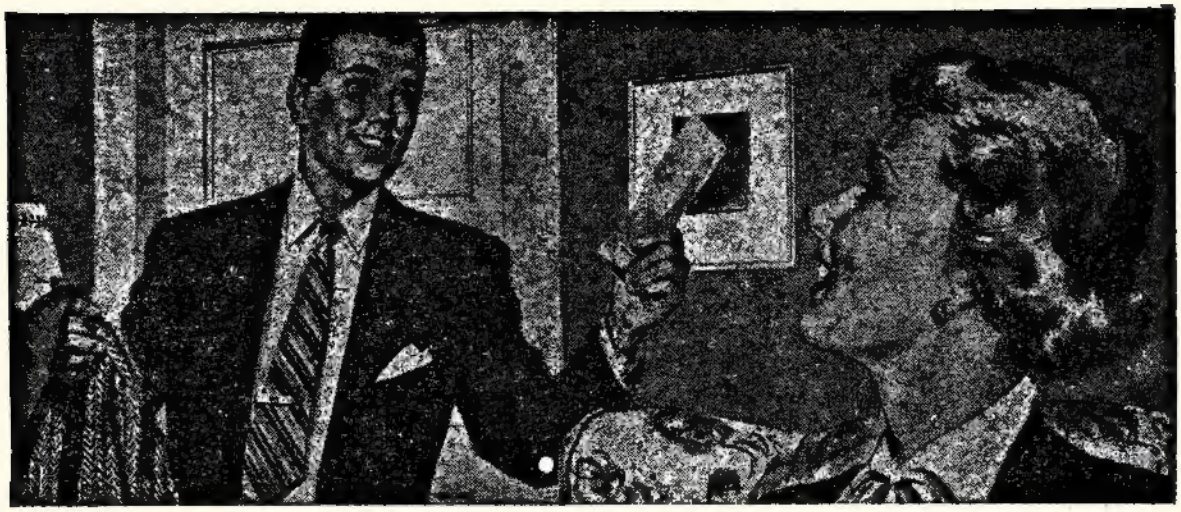
178

Vol. 45, No. 3

PRINTED IN THE U. S. A.

D. McILWRAITH, *Editor*



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- ☐ Auto-Elec. Technician
- ☐ Auto Body Rebuilding and Refinishing
- ☐ Diesel—Gas Engines

AVIATION
- ☐ Aeronautical Engineering Jr.
- ☐ Aircraft Engine Mechanic
- ☐ Airplane Drafting

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- ☐ Architecture
- ☐ Arch. Drafting
- ☐ Building Contractor
- ☐ Estimating
- ☐ Carpenter and Mill Work
- ☐ Carpenter Foreman
- ☐ Reading Blueprints
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- ☐ Plumbing
- ☐ Heating
- ☐ Steam Fitting
- ☐ Air Conditioning
- ☐ Electrician

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- ☐ Federal Tax
- ☐ Business Correspondence
- ☐ Personnel and Labor Relations
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You Can Influence Others With Your Thinking!

TRY IT SOME TIME. Concentrate intently upon another person seated in a room with you, without his noticing it. Observe him gradually become restless and finally turn and look in your direction. Simple—yet it is a *positive demonstration* that thought generates a mental energy which can be projected from your mind to the consciousness of another. Do you realize how much of your success and happiness in life depend upon your influencing others? Is it not important to you to have others understand your point of view—to be receptive to your proposals?

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How many times have you wished there were some way you could impress another favorably—*get across to him or her your ideas*? That thoughts can be transmitted, received, and understood by others is now scientifically demonstrable. The tales of miraculous accomplishments of mind by the ancients are now known to be fact—not fable. The method whereby these things can be *intentionally*, not accidentally, accomplished has been a secret long cherished by the Rosicrucians—one of the schools of ancient wisdom existing throughout the world. To thousands everywhere, for centuries, the Rosicrucians have privately taught this nearly-lost art of the practical use of mind power.

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The Rosicrucians (not a religious organization) invite you to explore the powers of your mind. Their sensible, simple suggestions have caused intelligent men and women to soar to new heights of accomplishment. *They will show* you how to use your natural forces and talents to do things you now think are beyond your ability. *Use the coupon below* and send for a copy of the fascinating sealed *free* book, "The Mastery of Life," which explains how you may receive this unique wisdom and benefit by its application to your daily affairs.

The ROSICRUCIANS
(AMORC)

Scribe P. F. B. The Rosicrucians, AMORC, Rosicrucian Park, San Jose, California.

Kindly send me a free copy of the book, "The Mastery of Life." I am interested in learning how I may receive instructions about the full use of my natural powers.

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Just mail us your name and address, and $1.00 cash, check or money-order. You will receive a 12 day supply of KELPIDINE CHEWING GUM (Improved Formula), and Dr. Phillips Reducing Plan postage prepaid.

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SENT ON APPROVAL — MAIL COUPON NOW!

The Editor, WEIRD TALES
9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20, N. Y.

Since I am one of your oldest and certainly one of your most faithful readers, I feel that I have more than a casual interest in WEIRD TALES.

It is this fact that emboldens me to speak my piece.

As I can recall, I have bought the magazine as far back as the late '20s without ever missing a copy. I have watched the quality wax and wane. I would say that it is in the intermediate stage now.

However, I am not critical, being satisfied to having one magazine consistently fantastic. If there were a few uncertain notes struck, they were more than compensated for by the remainder.

As events shape themselves, there seems to be a sharper line being drawn between Science Fiction and Fantasy. There is even caste system evolved and we have an intelligencia. I enjoy both types and read all that I can find. In fact, I set aside a special fund for the purchase of these magazines and books. The magazines, because storage space is at a premium, I exchange file by file with a friend for books. Of the books, I read all and shelve some, displacing the mediocre with the better.

I would also give place on my bookshelves to hard cover copies of collected stories from WEIRD TALES.

The world wants and needs escape literature these days. This fact was never demonstrated more clearly than by what happened to me the other evening on the way home. Sitting on the bus and examining my selection of Science and Fantasy magazines just purchased, I became aware of someone breathing down my neck. Turning, I met the beseeching gaze of a woman standing in the aisle behind my seat. She excused herself, (a rarity in these days) and asked if I would mind telling her where such magazines might be purchased. She was especially interested in WEIRD TALES. *After giving her exact directions, I offered her my copy and told her that I would buy another for myself the next day. Result—a new reader for you. She might never have ventured had I not cinched the deal right there. Of course, having read it, I knew she would keep coming.*

I should certainly like to see WEIRD TALES *more often and if an increase in price would guarantee it, well—so be it.*

Marty Hyde,
Chicago, Ill.

The Editor, WEIRD TALES
9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20, N. Y.

Judging from the vehement nature, even the torridity, so to speak, of the Lovecraft controversy, hubbub and rumpus, this author and writer of the spectral and spooky must have been the savant of the savants, the pundit of the pundits. In fact, when it comes to the haunted and eerie, the weird and unearthly, this moolvi of the moolvis must have been the jacal god, brother of Horus and conductor of the dead all in one. Yea, he must have been the reincarnation of old Anubis himself. What this guru's got to warrant all the encomium on the one side and the combination scourge, uhammo

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Join the thousands of happy wearers who now find joy in work and play and fun with the WRIGHT EASER FOR THEIR RUPTURE.

Stop wearing old fashioned and expensive devices. . . . Switch to the WRIGHT BRACER! It enables you to work on your old job, It will enable you to enjoy sports. IT WILL MAKE LIFE WORTH LIVING. ORDER NOW!

PERFECT FIT GUARANTEED!

IT'S ADJUSTABLE . . .

It's comfortable, and gives the relief you have been looking for. Just send measure around the lowest part of the abdomen and specify right side, left side or double. That's all there is to it!

Double **$4.95**

IT'S WASHABLE TOO!

It must be the strongest, best form-fitting easer you ever had —it must give more relief, it must fit better or you get your money back!

GET SCIENTIFIC SUPPORT!

No laces to bother with . . . simply step into it . . . adjust the leg strap and side straps . . . That's All! It's guaranteed not to show through clothing. No one — not even your dancing partner—can tell you are wearing it.

WORN BY EVERYONE!

THE WRIGHT EASER FOR YOUR RUPTURE comes in every size to fit men, women and children! It's worn by people in all walks of life! It has enabled printers to work on their printing presses 8 hours a day with ease and comfort! It is so inexpensive that many people buy two or three so they have one to change off with. It has made life worth living for many people. It enabled people to take part in all kinds of dancing, bowling, sports and enabled them to stand on their feet with ease and comfort . . . more than they have ever dreamed possible!

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YES! PLEASE RUSH MY "WRIGHT-EASER" on approval. If not delighted I may return within ten days. ☐ I enclose $3.95 for one side type. ☐ I enclose $4.95 for double type. (I save up to 75¢ postage by sending payment with order.)

Measure around lowest part of my abdomen is_____inches.

Right side ____ ☐ $3.95 Name_____

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Double ____ ☐ $4.95 City & State_____

SOLD ON 10 DAY MONEY BACK GUARANTEE

For Relief

and thuggee on the other is plenty, without a doubt. Verily, verily I must have been missing something!

Shove over, you fledglings of this WEIRD *Eyrie, there's another eaglet coming aboard.*

Clarence C. Walker,
Duluth, Minn.

The Editor, WEIRD TALES
9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20, N. Y.

Finding it difficult to get copies of WT in my neighborhood, I sent in for my subscription recently. Any other readers who might find it hard getting WT around town, I suggest they do likewise.

There's nothing like grabbing your copy of WT from the mail; sitting in the old easy chair to escape reality for awhile to live a life of high adventure.

I wish WT were a monthly publication as so many other readers do.

Much success to WT and all the people who make it one of the best magazines in the "pulp" field.

Clifford Doerfer,
Union City, N. J.

The Editor, WEIRD TALES
9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20, N. Y.

A few months ago, while searching around for reading material to fill in a spare evening, I chanced upon an old copy of WEIRD TALES. *As a preliminary to settling down, I quickly thumbed my way through the copy, to give me a general idea of the contents. It was then that I just realized that here was something really different in magazines, something to really appeal to the imagination.*

Since then, I have diligently traced down and bought every copy of WEIRD TALES *ever published in this country, unfortunately only nineteen in number, but they hold a place of honor amongst my highly variegated library.*

Your selection of stories and illustrations is well planned, each issue containing stories ranging from the near commonplace to the really fantastic, while the styles employed by artists give a good coverage, from the fastidious details of Vincent Napoli, to the truly weird illustrations of my favorites, Jon Arfstrom and Lee Brown Coye. Your poetry is particularly appealing. I seem to have memorized "Revenant" by Leah Bodine Drake, and "Hallowe'en in a Suburb" by the one and only H. P. Lovecraft after one reading.

I don't know how many letters you receive for your "Eyrie," but from now on you will be hearing from me regularly. We are rather starved for weird literature in this country.

J. W. Elmitt, Pilot Officer
R.A.F., Litchfield, England

(*Continued on page* 96)

TO BE MORE READABLE, more compact, more apparent—next issue WEIRD TALES is making its first important change in format in thirty years, and going to digest size. In your pocket you will be able to carry ghosts and goblins, werewolves and vampires, witches and spells. . . . Our stories will be just as good, our authors headliners as in the past, but we shall be all solid reading matter (no advertising), printed on better paper and more convenient to carry and to read.

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Weird Tales

ALWAYS THE BEST

L'Affaire Verenekin

by David Lewis Eynon

". . . an incident—a Kismet, if you prefer — which may cure you of wanting to know too much."

Heading by Joseph Eberle

"THE beauty of dying young," said Colonel Verenekin philosophically, "is that one doesn't have to face one's mistakes." The Colonel set his glass down on a copy of the *Stars & Stripes* and flicked a finger at the front page picture of a dead infantryman. "Notice how they fall," he said didactically. "Completely relaxed."

We sat alone at the bar in the Kretchma. The cafe had closed and the haze of smoke left by the customers thinned gradually. Over at the counter the manager was checking the night's receipts. Three musicians in the corner softly strummed their balalaikas while they finished their cigarettes. An ancient scrubwoman worked slowly across the floor.

"So," the Colonel said, drawing the cork from a bottle of Cognac, "the war goes well?"

"We're across the Rhine," I said.

"Fine. Excellent. Soon it is finished and you can go home." The Colonel said "home" in a dead tone that had no connection with any emotion. As he sat there, tunic open at the throat and his karacul cap leaning up against the bottle, I wondered if he had ever had a home.

The Colonel seemed genuine, not like most of the other White Russians in Paris. He never first-named the Romanovs or spoke of lost estates—but his bitter silence told more than the time dulled stories of the other refugees. Personal conversation was not his forte. He spoke of Russia almost never.

The Russian colony in Paris sprouted threadbare full dress and tarnished decora-

tions around Easter. The rest of the year they looked too natural as waiters, bootblacks or cab drivers to be taken seriously as nobility. The Colonel was different.

His beard had a square trim that practically screamed "Imperial Guards." Slashes of cartridges on his chest and the fourragere around his shoulder made him look like a real Cossack, even in the artificial atmosphere of the dingy cafe. The Colonel walked like a man who had always worn boots.

"What will the end of the war mean for you?" I asked.

"Who knows?" he said, cocking an eyebrow. "Many things, perhaps. Perhaps nothing. Who would want to know?"

"You don't care?" I asked, avoiding his eyes.

The Colonel filled my glass and then his own. He poured the liquor carefully until it raised a meniscus above the edge, then quickly swept it to his lips. He accepted a cigarette and blew the smoke slowly through his nostrils.

"It is possible, my young friend," he said dryly, between drags, "to know more than one would care to."

We sat in silence in the smoke filled room. A faded blonde torch singer nodded goodnight as she passed us on her way out. Two of the musicians left. The third switched to some melancholy tune of his own making. The scrubwoman moved methodically toward us. As she drew near the Colonel nodded to her and she spoke a few words of Russian to him.

The Colonel carefully stamped out his cigarette and poured us more Cognac. He looked over his shoulder and saw that the woman was out of earshot.

"I will tell you, if you like," the Colonel said, raising his glass slowly, "of an incident—a Kismet, if you prefer—that may cure you of wanting to know too much."

I edged my stool closer and turned to offer him a fresh cigarette. He drew sharply on it, letting the smoke trail out of his mouth as he spoke.

"That woman," he said, inclining his head toward the scrubwoman, "before the trouble in Russia she was a . . . never mind, a woman of consequence, at least."

"We were neighbors," he said. "Though not so close as we are now," he added with a smile. "After the revolution—before you were even born—she was in an awkward position. Thrown from her lands, a widow with an only son, she did not get far before the authorities had her."

"The Kerensky trouble was not so bad, you understand. They did not shoot old ladies, at least. For the present regime I do not care to commit myself." The Colonel smiled faintly again.

"But the son, that was a different matter. When the people and their court had finished with him, he had a day to live."

"Fortunately, the old woman was not without friends. I myself was a sergeant in the army at that time. A change in circumstances," he explained, gesturing with his long fingers.

"The Lieutenant in charge of our company was the son of this woman's former steward. All right, in his way, but inclined to drink. However," the Colonel said resignedly, "he kept my little secret, so I should not speak ill of him."

"The officials left the executions up to the military, naturally. What scribbler has the courage of his convictions?" he asked with a snort.

"The Lieutenant agreed to do what he could—for a price. So the woman sent the last of her jewelry, and he managed to get permission for her to take the body after the execution. Holy ground was cheap in those days—even a widow could afford it. So the boy was assured a decent burial, instead of being tossed into the lime pits which dissolved the heart and soul of Russia." The Colonel stared off into the distance for some minutes, then resumed.

"Beyond this," he explained, "we arranged to have the execution faked. It was a simple enough matter. One of my men

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was completely loyal—I instructed him to shoot for the shoulder, so some blood would be showing."

"The other soldiers were stupid recruits from the country. They would never realize that their cartridges were undercharged."

While the scrubwoman worked past us again the Colonel remained silent. She finished by the door and took her pail back for fresh water.

"I warned the son first, of course," the Colonel continued, "that he might not die of fright. And so our plot was complete."

The Colonel loosened his scarf and pulled his tunic open wider. He took another drink and then spoke again.

"A perfect plan, *hein?*" He nodded and smiled. "Yes, perfect. I see that the boy lives. The Lieutenant tells his mother. She pretends to have a funeral and everyone is satisfied. Fortunately, there was a shortage of physicians at the time. Death did not have to be certified."

The Colonel stopped to refill our glasses. He looked again to see if the woman was near.

"And so it worked," he continued softly. "Better than I had hoped. The boy fainted from the shock of being hit in the shoulder. It was a piece of luck, that, unconscious, he was hardly likely to give us away. I stepped up to administer the *coup de grace.* I fired my Steyr into the ground on the far side of his head—it looked quite convincing from where the firing squad stood. The concussion might have broken his eardrum, but that was a small price for life in those days.

"It only remained for the mother to pick up the 'body' and spirit her boy out of the country. There were many exits." The Colonel wiped some Cognac from his mustache and continued.

"I found it—convenient," he said wryly, "to leave the country shortly thereafter. Shooting one's old friends is not a pastime I enjoy. There was also some question of my hands being too well manicured." The Colonel studied his long, knotted fingers with their square cut nails. The lines around his mouth hardened.

(*Continued on page* 88)

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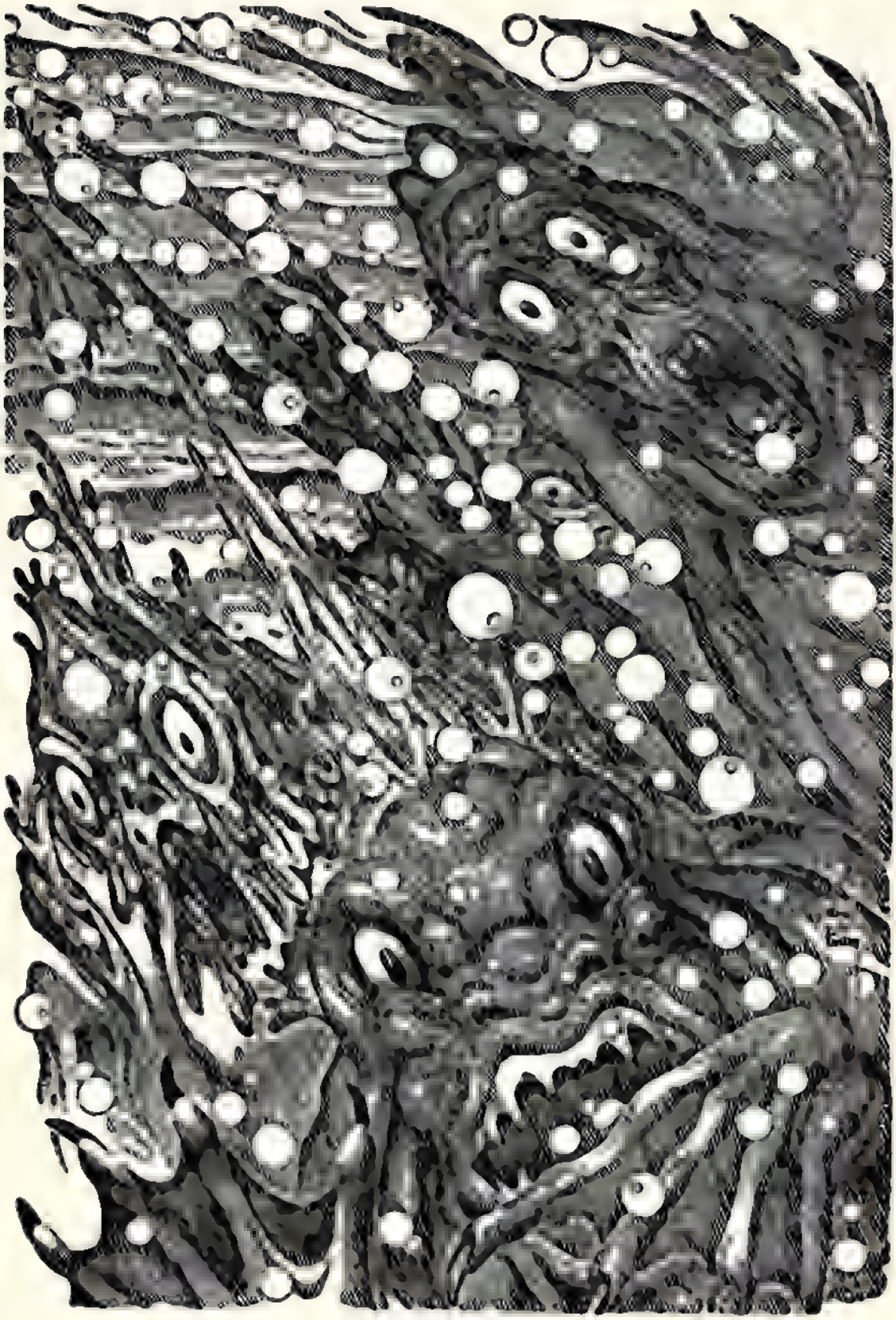

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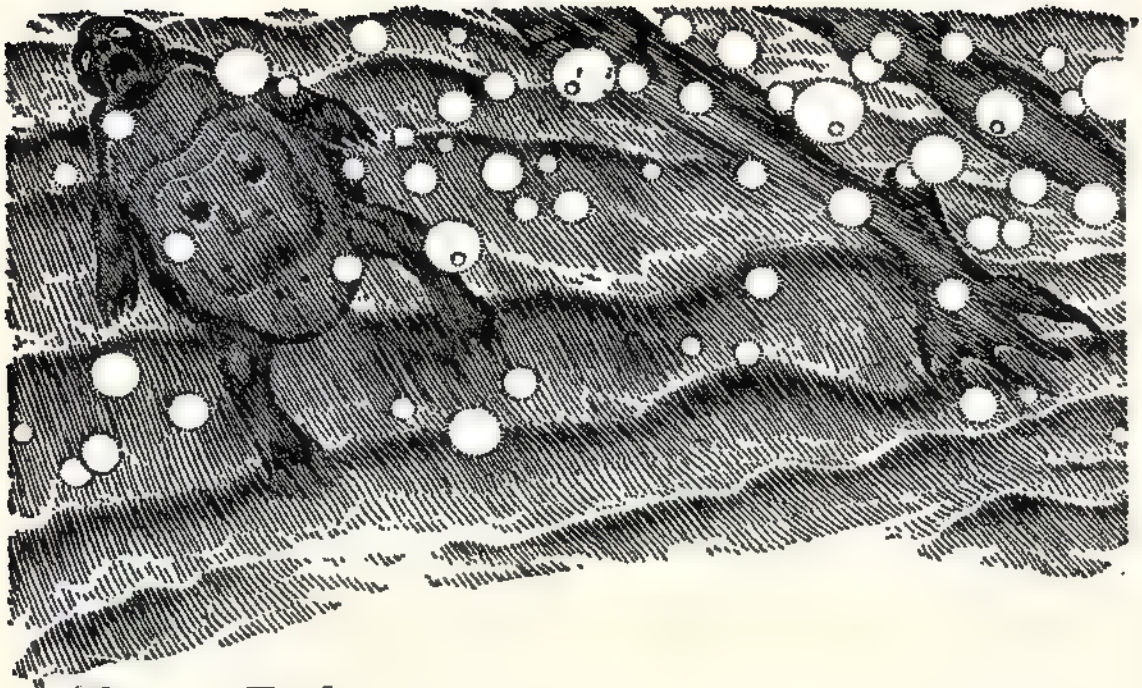

The House in the Valley

By August Derleth

I

I, JEFFERSON BATES, make this deposition now, in full knowledge that, whatever the circumstances, I have not long to live. I do so in justice to those who survive me, as well as in an attempt to clear myself of the charge of which I have been so unjustly convicted. A great, if little-known American writer in the tradition of the Gothic once wrote that "the most merciful thing in the world is the inability of the human mind to correlate all its contents," yet I have had ample time for intense thought and reflection, and I have achieved an order in my thoughts. I would never have thought possible only so little as a year ago.

For, of course, it was within the year that my "trouble" began. I put it so because I am not yet certain what other name to give it. If I had to set a precise day, I suppose in all fairness, it must be the day on which Brent Nicholson telephoned me in Boston to say he had discovered and rented for me the very place of isolation and natural beauty I had been seeking for the purpose of working at some paintings I had long had in mind. It lay in an almost hidden valley beside a broad stream, not far from, yet well in from the Massachusetts coast, in the vicinity of the ancient settlements of Arkham and Dunwich, which every artist of the region knows for their curious gambrel structure, so pleasing to the eye, however forbidding to the spirit.

Once more the epic struggle between the Elder Gods and the Ancient Ones was having repercussions on one of earth's seemingly most peaceful valleys.

True, I hesitated. There were always fellow artists pausing for a day in Arkham or Dunwich or Kingston, and it was precisely fellow-artists I sought to escape. But in the end, Nicholson persuaded me, and within the week I found myself at the place. It proved to be a large, ancient house—certainly of the same vintage as so many in Arkham—which had been built in a little valley which ought to have been fertile but showed no sign of recent cultivation. It rose among gaunt pines, which crowded close on the house, and along one wall ran a broad, clear brook.

Despite the attractiveness it offered the eye at a distance, up close it presented another face. For one thing, it was painted black. For another, it wore an air of forbidding formidableness. Its curtainless windows stared outward gloomily. All around it on the ground floor ran a narrow porch which had been stuffed and crammed with bundles of sacking tied with twine, half-rotted chairs, highboys, tables, and a singular variety of old-fashioned household objects, like a barricade designed either to keep someone or something inside or to prevent it from getting in. This barricade had manifestly been there a long time, for it showed the effects of exposure to several years of weather. Its reason for being was too obscure even for the agent, to whom I wrote to ask, but it did help to lend the house a most curious air of being inhabited, though there was no sign of life, and nothing, indeed, to show that anyone had lived there for a very long time.

But this was an illusion which never left me. It was plain to see that no one had been in the house, not even Nicholson or the agent, for the barricade extended across both front and back doors of the almost square structure, and I had to pull away a section of it in order to make an entry myself.

ONCE inside, the impression of habitation was all the stronger. But there was a difference—all the gloom of the black-painted exterior was reversed inside. Here everything was light and surprisingly clean, considering the period of its abandonment. Moreover, the house was furnished, scantily, true, but furnished, whereas I had received the distinct impression that everything which had once been inside had been piled up around the house on the veranda outside.

The house inside was as box-like as it appeared on the outside. There were four rooms below—a bedroom, a kitchen-pantry, a dining-room, a sitting-room; and upstairs, four of exacty the same dimensions—three bedrooms, and a storeroom. There were plenty of windows in all the rooms, and especially those facing north, which was gratifying, since the north light is best for painting.

I had no use for the second story; so I chose the bedroom on the northwest corner for my studio, and it was there that I put in my things, without regard for the bed, which I pushed aside. I had come, after all, to work at my paintings, and not for any social life whatever. And I had come amply supplied, with my car so laden that it took me most of the first day to unload and store my things, and to clear away a path from the back door, as I had cleared the front, so that I might have access to both north and south sides of the house with equal facility.

Once settled, with a lamp lit against the encroaching darkness, I took out Nicholson's letter and read it once more, as it were, in the proper setting, taking note again of the points he made.

"Isolation will indeed be yours. The nearest neighbors are at least a mile away. They are the Perkinses on the ridge to the south. Not far past them are the Mores. On the other side, which would make it north, are the Bowdens.

"The reason for the long-term desertion is one which ought to appeal to you. People did not want to rent or buy it simply because it had once been occupied by one of those strange, ingrown families which are common in obscure and isolated rural areas—the Bishops, of which the last surviving member, a gaunt, lanky creature named Seth, committed a murder in the house. This one fact the superstitious natives allow to deter them from use of either the house or the land, which, as you will see—if you had any use for it—is rich and fertile.

Even a murderer could be a creative artist in his way, I suppose—but Seth, I fear, was anything but that. He seems to have been somewhat crude, and killed without any good reason—a neighbor, I understand. Simply tore him apart. Seth was a very strong man. Gives me cold chills, but hardly you. The victim was a Bowden.

"There is a telephone, which I ordered connected.

"The house has its own power plant, too. So it's not as ancient as it looks. Though this was put in long after the house was originally built. It's in the cellar, I am told. It may not be working now.

"No waterworks, sorry. The well ought to be good, and you'll need some exercise to keep yourself fit—you can't keep fit sitting at an easel.

"The house looks more isolated than it is. If you get lonely, just telephone me."

The power plant, of which he had written, was not working. The lights in the house were dead. But the telephone was in working order, as I ascertained by placing a call to the nearest village, which was Aylesbury.

I was tired that first night, and went to bed early. I had brought my own bedding, of course, taking no chances on anything left for so long a time in the house, and I was soon asleep. But every instant of my initial day in the house I was aware of that vague, almost intangible conviction that the house was occupied by someone other than myself, though I knew how absurd this was for I had made a thorough tour of the house and premises soon after I had first entered it, and had found no place where anyone might be concealed.

EVERY house, as no sensitive person needs to be told, has its own individual atmospheres. It is not only the smell of wood, or of brick, old stone, paint—no, it is also a sort of residue of people who have lived there and of events which have transpired within its walls. The atmosphere of the Bishop house challenged description. There was the customary smell of age, which I expected, of dampness rising from the cellar, but there was something beyond this and of greater importance, something which actually lent the house itself an aura of life, as if it were a sleeping animal waiting with infinite patience for something, which it knew must happen, to take place.

It was not, let me say at once, anything to prompt uneasiness. It did not seem to me in that first week to have about it any element of dread or fear, and it did not occur to me to be at all disquieted until one morning in my second week—after I had already completed two imaginative canvases, and was at work outside on a third. I was conscious that morning of being scrutinized; at first I told myself, jokingly, that of course the house was watching me, for its windows did look like blank eyes peering out of that sombre black; but presently I knew that my observer stood somewhere to the rear, and from time to time I flashed glances toward the edge of the little woods which rose southwest of the house.

At last I located the hidden watcher. I turned to face the bushes where he was concealed, and said, "Come on out; I know you're there."

At that a tall, freckle-faced young man rose up and stood looking at me with hard, dark eyes, manifestly suspicious and belligerent.

"Good morning," I said.

He nodded, without saying anything.

"If you're interested, come on up and have a look," I said.

He thawed a little and stepped out of the bushes. He was, I saw now, perhaps twenty. He was clad in jeans, and was barefooted, a lithe young fellow, well-muscled, and undoubtedly quick and alert. He walked forward a little way, coming just close enough so that he could see what I was doing, and there stopped. He favored me with a frank examination. Finally he spoke.

"Your name Bishop?"

Of course, the neighbors might understandably think that a member of the family had turned up in some remote corner of the earth and come back to claim the abandoned property. The name of Jefferson Bates would mean nothing to him. Moreover, I was curiously reluctant to tell him my name, which I could not understand. I answered

civilly enough that my name was not Bishop, that I was not a relative, that I had only rented the house for the summer and perhaps a month or two in the fall.

"My name's Perkins," he said. "Bud Perkins. From up yonder." He gestured toward the ridge to the south.

"Glad to know you."

"You been here a week," Bud continued, offering proof that my arrival had not gone unnoticed in the valley. "You're still here."

There was a note of surprise in his voice, as if the fact of my being in the Bishop house after a week was strange of itself.

"I mean," he went on, "nothing's happened to you. What with all the goin's-on in this house, it's a wonder."

"What goings-on?" I asked bluntly.

"Don't you know?" he asked, open-mouthed.

"I know about Seth Bishop."

He shook his head vigorously. "That ain't near the all of it, Mister. I wouldn't set foot in that house if I was paid for it—and paid good. Makes my spine prickle jest to be standing this near to it." He frowned darkly. "It's a place should-a been burned down long ago. What were them Bishops doing all hours of the night?"

"Looks clean," I said. "It's comfortable enough. Not even a mouse in it."

"Hah! If 'twas only mice! You wait."

With that he turned and plunged back into the woods.

I realized, of course, that many local superstitions must have arisen about the abandoned Bishop house; what more natural than that it should be haunted? Nevertheless, Bud Perkins' visit left a disagreeable impression with me. Clearly, I had been under secret observation ever since my arrival; I understood that new neighbors are always of interest to people, but I also perceived that the interest of my neighbors in this isolated spot was not of quite that nature. They expected something to happen; they were waiting for it to take place; and only the fact that nothing had as yet occurred had brought Bud Perkins within range.

That night the first untoward "incident" took place. Quite possibly Bud Perkins' oblique comments had set the stage by preparing me for something to happen. In any case, the incident was so nebulous as to be almost negative, and there were a dozen explanations for it; it is only in the light of later events that I remember it at all. It happened perhaps two hours after midnight.

I was awakened from sleep by an unusual sound. Now, anyone sleeping in a new place grows accustomed to the sounds of the night in that region, and, once accustomed to them, accepts them in sleep; but any new sound is apt to obtrude. Just as a city-dweller spending several nights on a farm may accustom himself to the noises of chickens, birds, the wind, frogs, may be awakened by the new note of a toad trilling because it is strange to the chorus to which he has become accustomed, so I was aware of a new sound in the chorus of whippoorwills, owls, and nocturnal insects which invaded the night.

THE new sound was a subterranean one; that is, it seemed to come from far below the house, deep down under the surface of the earth. It might have been earth settling, it might have been a fissure opening and closing, it might readily have been a fugitive temblor, except that it came and went with a certain regularity, as if it were made by some very large thing moving along a colossal cavern far beneath the house. It lasted perhaps half an hour; it seemed to approach from the east and diminish in the same direction in a fairly even progression of sounds. I could not be sure, but I had the uncertain impression that the house trembled faintly under these subterranean sounds.

Perhaps it was this which impelled me on the following day to poke about in the storeroom in an effort to find out for myself what my inquisitive neighbor had meant by his questions and hints about the Bishops. What had they been doing that their neighbors thought so bad?

The storeroom, however, was less crammed than I had expected it to be, perhaps largely because so many things had been put out on the veranda. Indeed, the only unusual aspect of it that I could find was a shelf of books which had evidently

been in the process of being read when tragedy had obliterated the family.

These were of various kinds.

Perhaps chief among them were several gardening texts. They were extremely old books, and had been long in disuse, quite possibly hidden away by an earlier member of the Bishop family, and only recently discovered. I glanced into two or three of these, and found them to be completely useless for any modern gardener, since they described methods of raising and caring for plants which were unknown to me, for the most part—hellebore, mandrake, nightshade, witch hazel, and the like; and such of the pages which were given over to the more familiar vegetables were filled with bits of lore and superstition which held utterly no meaning for anyone in this modern world.

There was also one paper-covered book devoted to the lore of dreams. This did not appear to have been much read, though its condition was such for dust and lint, that it was impossible to draw any conclusions about it. It was one of those inexpensive books which were popular two or three generations ago, and its dream interpretations were the most ordinary; it was, in short, just such a book as one might expect a rather ignorant countryman to pick up.

Indeed, of them all, only one interested me. This was a most curious book indeed. It was a monumental tome, entirely copied in longhand, and bound by hand in wood. Though it very probably had no literary worth whatsoever, it could have existed in any museum as an item of curiosa. At that time I made little attempt to read it, for it seemed to be a compilation of gibberish similar to the nonsense in the dream book. It had a crudely lettered title which indicated that its ultimate source must have been some private old library—*Seth Bishop, His Book . . . Being Excerpts from the "Nekronomicon" & the "Cultes des Ghouls" & the "Pnakotic Manuscripts" & the "R'lyeh Text" Copied in His Own Hand by Seth Bishop in the Yrs. 1919 to 1923.* Underneath, in a spidery hand which did not seem likely for one known to be so uneducated, he had scrawled his signature.

In addition to these, there were several works allied to the dream book. A copy of the notorious *Seventh Book of Moses,* a text much prized by certain oldsters in the Pennsylvania hex country—which, thanks to newspaper accounts of a recent hex murder, I knew about. A slender prayer-book in which all the prayers seemed to be mockeries, for all were directed to Asarael and Sathanus, and other dark angels.

There was nothing of any value whatsoever, apart from being simply curious items, in the entire lot. Their presence testified only to a diversity of dark interests on the part of succeeding generations of the Bishop family, for it was fairly evident that the owner and reader of the gardening books was very probably Seth's grandfather, while the owner of the dream book and the hex text was most likely a member of Seth's father's generation. Seth himself seemed interested in more obscure lore.

The works from which Seth had copied, however, seemed appreciably more erudite than I had been led to believe a man of Seth's background would be likely to consult. This puzzled me, and at the first opportunity I traveled into Aylesbury to make such inquiries as I could at a country store on the outskirts of the village, where, I reasoned, Seth might most probably have made purchases, since he had had the reputation of being a reclusive individual.

THE proprietor, who turned out to be a distant relative of Seth's on his mother's side, seemed somewhat loath to speak of Seth, but did ultimately reveal something in his reluctant answers to my persistent questions. From him, whose name was Obed Marsh, I gathered that Seth had "at first"—that is, presumably as a child and young man—been as "backward as any of that clan." In Seth's later teens, he had grown "queer," by which Marsh meant that Seth had taken to a more solitary existence; he had spoken at that time with frequency of strange and disturbing dreams he had had, of noises he had heard, of visions he believed he saw in and out of the house; but, after two or three years of this, Seth had never mentioned a word of these things again. Instead, he had locked himself up in a room—which had certainly been the storeroom, judging by

Marsh's description—and read everything he could lay his hands on, for all that he never "went past the fourth grade." Later on, he had gone into Arkham, to the library of Miskatonic University, to read more books. After that "spell," Seth had come home and lived as a solitary until the time of his outbreak—the horrible murder of Amos Bowden.

All this, certainly, added up to little save a tale of a mind ill-equipped for learning, trying desperately to assimilate knowledge, the burden of which seemed to have ultimately snapped that mind. So, at least, it appeared at this juncture of my tenure of the Bishop house.

II

THAT night events took a singular turn. But, like so many other aspects of that strange sojourn, I was not aware immediately of the full implications of what happened. Set down baldly, it seems absurd that it should have given me any cause for second thought. It was nothing more than a dream which I experienced in the course of that night. Even as a dream, it was not particularly horrifying or even frightening, rather more awesome and impressive.

I dreamed simply that I lay asleep in the Bishop house, that while I so lay a vague, indefinable, but somehow awesome and powerful cloud—like a fog or mist—took shape out of the cellar, billowed up through the floors and walls, engulfing the furniture, but not seeming to harm it or the house, taking shape, meanwhile, as a huge, amorphous creature with tentacles flowing from its monstrous head, and swaying like a cobra back and forth all the while it gave voice to a strange ululation, while from somewhere in the distance a chorus of weird instruments played unearthly music, and a human voice chanted inhuman words which, as I subsequently learned, were written thusly:

Ph'nglui mglw'nafh Cthulhu R'lyeh
wgah'nagl fhtagn

In the end, the amorphous creature billowed even farther upward and engulfed also the sleeper who was I. Thereupon it seemed to dissolve into a long dark passageway, down which came at a frantically eager lope a human being who was certainly similar in appearance to descriptions I had had of the late Seth Bishop. This being grew in size, too, looming almost as large as the amorphous fog, and vanished even as it had done, coming straight at the sleeping figure in the bed in that house in the valley.

Now, on the face of it, this dream was meaningless. It was a nightmare, beyond question; but it lacked any capacity for fear. I seemed to be aware that something of tremendous importance was happening to me or about to happen to me, but, not understanding it, I could not fear it; moreover, the amorphous creature, the chanting voice, the ululations, and the strange music all lent a ritual impressiveness to the dream.

ON AWAKENING in the morning, however, I found it readily possible to recall the dream, and I was obsessed with a persistent conviction that all its aspects were not really strange to me. Somewhere I had heard or seen the written equivalent of that fantastic chanting, and, so thinking, I found myself once more in the storeroom, poring over that incredible book in Seth Bishop's handwriting; reading here and there and discovering with wonder that the text concerned an ancient series of beliefs in Elder Gods and Ancient Ones and a conflict between them, between the Elder Gods and such creatures as Hastur and Yog-Sothoth and Cthulhu. This, at last, struck a familiar note, and, seeking farther, I discovered what was certainly the chant I had heard—with, moreover, its translation in Seth Bishop's hand, which read:

In his house at R'lyeh dead Cthulhu waits dreaming.

The one disturbing factor in this discovery was that I had most certainly not seen the line of the chant on occasion of my examination of the room. I might have seen the name "Cthulhu," but nothing more in that cursory glance at the Bishop manuscript. How then could I have duplicated a fact which was not part of my conscious or subconscious store of knowledge? It is not commonly believed that the mind can dupli-

cate in a dream state or any other any experience which is utterly alien to it. Yet I had done so.

What was more, as I read on in that often shocking text of queer survivals and hellish cults, I found that hints in vague descriptive passages described just such a being as I had seen in my dream—not of fog or mist, but of solid matter, which was a second occurrence of the duplication of something utterly alien to my experience.

I had, of course, heard of psychic residue—residual forces left behind at the scene of any event, be it major tragedy or any powerful emotional experience common to mankind—love, hate, fear—and it was possible that something of this sort had brought about my dream, as were it the atmosphere of the house itself invading and possessing me while I slept, which I did not regard as completely impossible, since certainly it was strange and the events which had taken place there were experiences of impressive power.

Now, however, though it was noon and the demands of my body for food were great, it seemed to me that the next step in pursuit of my dream lay in the cellar. So to it I made my way at once, and there, after a most exhaustive search, which included the moving away from the walls of tiers of shelves, some still with ancient jars of preserved fruit and vegetables on them, I discovered a hidden passageway which led out of the cellar into a cave-like tunnel, down part of which I walked. I did not go far, before the dampness of the earth underfoot, and the wavering of my light, forced me to return—but not before I had seen the disquieting whiteness of scattered bones, embedded in that earth.

When I returned to that subterranean passageway after replenishing my flashlight, I did not quit it before ascertaining beyond reasonable doubt that the bones were those of animals—for, clearly, there had been more than one animal. What was disturbing about their discovery was not their being there, but the puzzling question of how they had got there.

But I did not at the time give this much thought. I was interested in pushing deeper into that tunnel, and I did so, going as far in the direction, I thought, of the seacoast, as I could before my passage was blocked by a fall of earth. When at last I left the tunnel it was late in the afternoon, and I was famished; but I was reasonably certain of two things—the tunnel was not a natural cave, at least at this end; it was clearly the work of human hands; and it had been used for some dark purpose, the nature of which I could not know.

Now for some reason, these discoveries filled me with excitement. Had I been fully in control of myself, I have no doubt that I would have realized that this in itself was unlike me, but at the moment I was faced and challenged with a mystery which seemed to me insistently of the greatest importance, and I was determined to discover all I could of this apparently hitherto unknown part of the Bishop property. This I could not very well do until another day, and in order to find my way through the cave, I would need implements I had not yet found on the property.

ANOTHER trip to Aylesbury was unavoidable. I went at once to the store of Obed Marsh and asked for a pick and shovels. For some reason, this request seemed to upset the old man beyond all reason. He paled and hesitated to wait on me.

"You aimin' to dig, Mr. Bates?"

I nodded.

" 'Taint none o' my business, but maybe you'd like to know that was what Seth took to doin' for a spell. Wore out three, four shovels, diggin'." He leaned forward, his intense eyes glittering. "And the queerest thing about it was nobody could find out where he was diggin'—never see a shovelful of dirt anywhere."

I was somewhat taken aback by this information, but I did not hesitate. "That soil there around the house looks rich and fertile," I said.

He seemed relieved. "Well, if you're aimin' to garden, that's a different thing."

One other purchase I made puzzled him. I needed a pair of rubber boots to shield my shoes from the muck and mud of many parts of the tunnel floor, where, doubtless, the nearness of the brook outside caused

seepage. But Marsh said nothing about this. As I turned to go, he spoke again of Seth.

"Ain't heard tell anything more, have you, Mr. Bates?"

"People hereabouts don't talk much."

"They ain't all Marshes," he replied, with a furtive grin. "There's some that do say Seth was more Marsh than Bishop. The Bishops believed in hexes and such-like. But never the Marshes."

With this cryptic announcement ringing in my ears, I took my leave. Prepared now for the tunnel, I could hardly wait for the morrow to come, so that I could return once more to that subterranean place and carry on my explorations into a mystery which must certainly have been related to the entire legendry surrounding the Bishop family.

Events were now moving forward at an increasing tempo. That night two more occurrences were recorded.

The first came to my attention just past dawn, when I caught sight of Bud Perkins lurking about outside the house. I was needlessly annoyed, perhaps, since I was making ready to descend into the cellar; just the same, I wanted to know what he was after; so I opened the door and stepped out into the yard to confront him.

"What are you looking for, Bud?" I asked.

"Lost a sheep," he said laconically.

"I haven't seen it."

"It come this way," he answered.

"Well, you're welcome to look."

"Sure hate to think this's all settin' up to start again," he said.

"What do you mean?"

"If you don't know, 'twon't do any good to say. If you do, it's better I don't say a thing, anyway. So I'm not sayin'."

This mystifying conversation baffled me. At the same time, Bud Perkins' obvious suspicion that somehow his sheep had come to my hands was irritating. I stepped back and threw open the door.

"Look in the house if you like."

But, at this, his eyes opened wide in positive horror. "Me set foot in there?" he cried. "Not for my life." He added, "Why, I'm the only one's got gumption enough to come this close to this place. But I wouldn't step in there for all the money you could pay me. Not me."

"It's perfectly safe," I said, unable to conceal a smile at his fright.

"Maybe you think so. We know better. We know what's waitin' there behind them black walls, waitin' and waitin' for somebody to come. And now you've come. And now things are startin' up again, jest like before."

WITH that, he turned and ran, vanishing as on his previous visit into the woods. When I had satisfied myself that he was not coming back, I turned and re-entered the house. And there I made a discovery which ought to have been alarming, but which seemed to me then only vaguely unusual, since I must clearly have been in a lethargic state, not yet fully awake. The new boots I had bought only yesterday for my use had been used; they were caked with mud. Yet I knew indisputably that they had been clean and unused yesterday.

At sight of them, a growing conviction took form in my mind. Without putting on the boots, I descended into the cellar, opened the wall into the tunnel, and walked rapidly to the area of the barrier. Perhaps I had a premonitory certainty of what I would find, for I found it—the cave-in of earth had been dug partially away, sufficiently for a man to squeeze through. And the tracks in the wet earth were clearly made by the new boots I had bought, for the stamped trademark in the sole of those boots was plainly to be seen in the glow of my flashlight.

I was thus faced with one of two alternatives—either someone had used my boots in the night to effect this change in the tunnel, or I myself had walked in my sleep to bring it about. And I could not much doubt which it had been—for, despite my eagerness and anticipation, I was fatigued in a way which would have been accounted for only by my having spent a considerable portion of my sleeping hours digging away at this blockade in the passageway.

I cannot escape the conviction now that even then I knew what I should find when I pursued my way down that tunnel—the ancient altar-like structures in the subter-

ranean caverns into which the tunnels opened, the evidence of further sacrifice—not alone animals this time, but undeniably human bones, and at the end, the vast cavern opening downward and the faint glimmering far below of waters, surging powerfully in and out through some opening far down, the Atlantic Ocean itself, beyond doubt, which had made its way to this place by means of subsurface caverns on the coast. And I must have had a premonition, too, of what else I should see there at the edge of that final descent into the aquatic abyss—the tufts of wool, the single hoof with its portion of torn and broken leg—all that remained of a sheep, fresh as the night just past!

I turned and fled, badly shaken, unwilling to guess how the sheep had got there—Bud Perkins' animal, I felt certain. And had it, too, been brought there for the same purpose as the creatures whose remains I had seen before those dark and broken altars in the lesser caverns between this place of constantly stirring waters and the house I had left not long ago?

I did not tarry in the house long, either, but made my way into Aylesbury once again, apparently aimlessly, but, as I know now, pressed by my need to know yet more of what legend and lore had accumulated about the Bishop house. But at Aylesbury I experienced for the first time the full force of public disapproval, for people on the street averted their eyes from me and turned their backs to me. One young man to whom I spoke hurried past me as if I had not spoken at all.

Even Obed Marsh had changed in his attitude. He was nothing loath to take my money, but was surly in his manner and obviously wished that I would leave his store as soon as possible. But here I made it clear I would not move until my questions had been answered.

What had I done, I wanted to know, that people should shun me as they did?

"It's that house," he said finally.

"I'm not the house," I retorted, dissatisfied.

"There's talk," he said then.

"Talk? What kind of talk?"

"About you and Bud Perkins' sheep. About the way things happened when Seth Bishop was alive." Then he leaned forward with a dark, beetling face, and whispered harshly, "There's them that say Seth's come back."

"Seth Bishop's dead and buried this long time."

He nodded. "Aye, part of him is. But part of him maybe ain't. I'll tell you, best thing in the world is for you to clear out now. You got time yet."

I reminded him coldly that I had leased the Bishop place and had paid the rent for at least four months, with an option to complete a year there. He clammed up at once and would say nothing further about my tenure. I pressed him, nevertheless, for details about Seth Bishop's life, but all he would or could tell me was clearly the summation of vague, uncertain hints and dark suspicions which had been common in the vicinity, so that I left him at last not with any picture of Seth Bishop as a man to be feared, but rather of him as a man to be pitied, kept at bay in his black-walled house in the valley like an animal by his neighbors on the ridge and the people of Aylesbury, who were at one in hating and fearing him, without any but the most circumstantial evidence that he had committed any crime against the safety or peace of the environs.

What, in fact, had Seth Bishop knowingly done—apart from the final crime of which he had been proved guilty? He had led a recluse's existence, abandoning even the strange garden of his ancestors, turning his back, certainly, on what was reputed to be his grandfather's and his father's sinister interest in wizardry and the lore of the occult, instead of which he had interested himself obsessively in a far more ancient lore which appeared to me to be fully as ridiculous as that of witchcraft. One might expect such interests not to falter in such isolated areas, and, in particular, among families so ingrown as the Bishop family was.

Perhaps somewhere in the old books of his forebears Seth had found certain obscure references which had sent him to the library at Miskatonic, where, in his consuming interest, he had undertaken the mon-

umental task of copying great portions of books, which, presumably, he could not get permission to withdraw from the library.

This lore which was his primary concern was, in fact, a distortion of ancient Christian legend; reduced to its most simple terms, it was a record of the cosmic struggle between forces of good and forces of evil.

HOWEVER difficult it was to summarize, it would appear that the first inhabitants of outer space were great beings, not in human shape, who were called the Elder Gods and lived on Betelguese, at a remote time. Against these certain elemental Ancient Ones, also called the Great Old Ones, had rebelled—Azathoth, Yog-Sothoth, the amphibious Cthulhu, the bat-like Hastur the Unspeakable, Lloigor, Zhar, Ithaqua, the wind-walker, and the earth beings, Nyarlathotep and Shub-Niggurath; but, their rebellion failing, they were cast out and banished by the Elder Gods—locked away on far planets and stars under the seal of the Elder Gods—Cthulhu deep under the sea in the place known as R'lyeh, Hastur on a black star near Aldebaran in the Hyades, Ithaqua in the icy Arctic barrens, still others in a place known as Kadath in the Cold Waste, which existed in time and space conterminously with a portion of Asia.

Since this initial rebellion—which was basically in a legend pattern paralleling the rebellion of Satan and his followers against the arch-angels of Heaven—the Great Old Ones had continually sought to regain their power to war against the Elder Gods, and there have grown up on earth and other planets certain cultists and followers—like the Abominable Snowmen, the Dholes, the Deep Ones, and many others, all dedicated to serve the Ancient Ones, and often succeeding in removing the Elder Seal to free the forces of ancient evil, which had then to be put down again either by direct intervention of the Elder Gods or by the alert watchfulness of human beings armed against them.

This was the sum total of what Seth Bishop had copied from very old and very rare books, much of it repetitive, and all surely the wildest kind of fantasy. True, there were certain disturbing newspaper clippings appended to the manuscript—of what happened at Devil Reef off Innsmouth in 1928, of a supposed sea serpent in Rick's Lake, Wisconsin, of a terrible occurrence at nearby Dunwich, and another in the wilds of Vermont, but these, beyond question, I felt to be coincidental accounts which happened to strike a parallel chord. And, while it was also true that there was as yet no explanation for the subterranean passage leading toward the coast, I felt comfortably certain that it was the work of some distant forebear of Seth Bishop's; and only appropriated for his own use at a considerably later date.

All that emerged from this was the portrait of an ignorant man striving to improve himself in the directions which appealed to him. Gullible and superstitious he may have been, and at the end, perhaps deranged—but evil, surely not.

III

IT WAS at about this time that I became aware of a most curious fancy.

It seemed to me that there was someone else in the house in the valley, an alien human being who had no business there, but intruded from outside. Though his occupation seemed to be to paint pictures, I was reasonably certain that he had come to spy. I caught only the most fugitive glimpses of him—on occasion a reflection in a mirror or in a windowpane when I was near, but I saw in the north room of the ground floor the evidence of his work—one unfinished canvas on his easel, and several that had been completed.

I did not have the time to look for him, for the One below commanded me, and each night I descended with food, not for him, for he devoured what no mortal man knew, but for those of the deeps who accompanied him, and came swimming up out of that cavernous pit, and were to my eyes like a travesty born of men and batrachian things, with webbed hands and feet, and gilled, and wide, frog-like mouths, and great searing eyes made to see in the darkest recesses of the vast seas about the place where He lay sleeping, waiting to rise and come forth once more and take posses-

sion again of his kingdom, which was on Earth and in the space and time all about this planet, where once he had ruled above all others until the casting-down.

Perhaps this was the result of my coming upon the old diary, which now I settled down to read, as were it a book I had treasured since childhood. I found it by accident in the cellar, mildewed and showing the effects of having been long lost—a fortunate thing, for there were in it things no outsider should see.

The early pages were gone, having been torn out and burned in an access of fear, before any self-confidence had come. But all the others were still there, and plain to be read in their spidery script. . . .

"Jun. 8, Went to the meeting-place at eight, dragging the calf from Mores. Counted forty-two of the Deep Ones. Also one other, not of them, which was like an octopus, but was not. Remained there three hours."

That was the first entry I saw. Thereafter the entries were similar—of trips underground to the water pits, of meetings with the Deep Ones and occasionally other water beings. In September of that year, a catastrophe . . .

"Sept. 21, The pits crowded. Learned something terrible had happened at Devil Reef. One of the old fools at Innsmouth gave things away, and the Federal men came with submarines and boats to blast Devil Reef and the waterfront at Innsmouth. The Marsh crowd got away, most of them. Many Deep Ones killed. Depth charges did not reach R'lyeh where He lies dreaming. . . .

"Sept. 22, More reports from Innsmouth. 371 Deep Ones killed. Many taken from Innsmouth, all those who were given away by the Marsh 'look'. One of them said what was left of the Marsh clan had fled to Ponape. Three of the Deep Ones here tonight from that place; they say they remember how old Captain Marsh came there, and what a compact he made with them, and how he took one of them and married her, and had children who were born of man and the Deep Ones, tainting the whole Marsh clan forever, and how ever since then the Marsh ships fared well, and all their sea enterprises succeeded beyond their wildest dreams; they grew rich and powerful, the wealthiest of all the families at Innsmouth, to which they took their clan to live by day in the houses and by night slipping away to be with the other Deep Ones off the reef. The Marsh houses in Innsmouth were burned. So the Federal men knew. But the Marshes will be back, say the Deep Ones, and all will begin again toward that day when the Great Old One below the sea will rise once more.

"Sept. 23, Destruction terrible at Innsmouth.

"Sept. 24, It will be years before the Innsmouth places will be ready again. They will wait till the Marshes come back."

They might say what they liked of Seth Bishop. No fool, he. This was the record of a self-educated man. All that work at Miskatonic had not been in vain. He alone of all who lived in the Aylesbury region knew what lay hidden in the Atlantic depths off the coast; none other even suspected. . . .

This was the direction of my thoughts, the preoccupation of my days at the Bishop house. I thought thusly, I lived so. And by night?

Once darkness had come to the house, I was more keenly aware than ever that something impended. But somehow memory rejects what must have happened. Could it be otherwise? I knew why that furniture had been moved out on the veranda—because the Deep Ones had begun to come back along the passage, had come up into the house. They were amphibious. They had literally crowded the furniture out and Seth had never taken it back.

EACH time I left the house to go any distance, I seemed to see it once again in its proper perspective, which was no longer possible while I occupied it. The attitude of my neighbors was now quite threatening. Not only Bud Perkins came to look at the house, but some of the Bowdens and the Mores, and certain others from Aylesbury. I let them all in, without comment—those who would come. Bud would not, nor would any of the Bowdens. But the others searched in vain for what they expected to find and did not.

And what was it they expected to find? Certainly not the cows, the chickens, the pigs and sheep they said had been taken. What use would I have for them? I showed them how frugally I lived, and they looked at the paintings. But one and all went away sullenly, shaking their heads, unconvinced.

Could I do more? I knew they shunned and hated me, and kept their distance from the house.

But they disturbed and troubled me, nevertheless. There were mornings when I woke near to noon, and woke exhausted, as if I had not slept at all. Most troubling of all, often I found myself dressed, whereas I knew I had gone to bed undressed, and I found blood spattered on my clothing and covering my hands.

I was afraid to go back into that subterranean passage by day, but I forced myself to do so one day, just the same. I went down with my flashlight, and I examined the floor of that tunnel with care. Wherever the earth was soft, I saw the marks of many feet, passing back and forth. Most of them were human footprints, but there were disquieting others—naked feet with blurred toes, as if they were webbed! I confess I turned the light away from them, shuddering.

What I saw at the edge of the water pits sent me fleeing back along the passage. Something had climbed out of those watery depths—the marks were plain to see and understand, and what had taken place there was not difficult to imagine, for all the evidence scattered there in the mute remains which lay gleaming whitely under the glow of my flashlight.

I knew it could not be long before the neighbors allowed their resentment to boil over. There was no peace capable of achievement in that house, nor, indeed, in the valley. Old hatreds, old enmities persisted, and thrived in that place. I soon lost all sense of time; I existed in another world, literally, for the house in the valley was surely the focal point for entry into another realm of being.

I DO not know how long I had been in the house—perhaps six weeks—perhaps two months—when one day the sheriff of the county, accompanied by two of his deputies, came grim-faced to the house with a warrant for my arrest. He explained that he did not wish to use the warrant, but that nevertheless, he wished to question me, and if I did not accompany him and his men willingly, he would have no alternative but to use the warrant, which, he confided, was based on a serious charge, the nature of which seemed to him grossly exaggerated and entirely unmotivated.

I went along willingly enough—all the way to Arkham, in which ancient, gambrel-roofed town I felt strangely at ease and completely unafraid of what was to come. The sheriff was an amiable man who had been driven to this deed, I had not the slightest doubt, by my neighbors. He was almost apologetic, now that I found myself seated opposite him in his office, with a stenographer to take down notes.

He began by wanting to know whether I had been away from the house night before last.

"Not to my knowledge," I answered.

"You could hardly leave your house and not know it."

"If I walked in my sleep, I could."

"Are you in the habit of walking in your sleep?"

"I wasn't before coming here. Since then, I don't know."

He asked meaningless questions, always skirting the central point of his mission. But this emerged presently. A human being had been seen in charge of a company of some kind of animals, leading the pack to an attack on a herd of cattle in night pasture. All but two of the cattle had been literally torn to pieces. The cattle had belonged to young Sereno More, and it was he who had made the charge against me, an act in which he was abetted by Bud Perkins, who was even more insistent than Sereno.

Now that he had put the charge into words, it seemed more ridiculous than ever. He himself apparently felt so, for he became more than ever apologetic. I myself could hardly forbear laughing. What motive could I have for so mad an act? And what "animals" could I have led? I owned none, not even a dog or cat.

Nevertheless, the sheriff was politely persistent. How had I come by the scratches visible on my arms?

I seemed to be aware of them for the first time and gazed at them thoughtfully.

Had I been picking berries?

I had, and said so. But I added also that I could not recall having been scratched.

The sheriff seemed relieved at this. He confided that the scene of the attack on the cattle was bordered on one side by a hedge of blackberry bushes, the coincidence of my bearing scratches was bound to be noticed, and he could not ignore it. Nevertheless, he appeared to be satisfied, and, being satisfied that I was no more than I pretended to be, he became somewhat more loquacious; thus I learned that once before a similar event had occurred, with the charge that time being leveled at Seth Bishop, but, like this, it had come to nothing, the Bishop house had been searched, nothing had been found, and the attack was so baseless and unmotivated that no one could be brought to trial on the suspicions, however dark, of the neighbors.

I assured him that I was perfectly willing that my house be searched, and he grinned at this, and told me in all friendliness that it had been searched from roof to cellar while I was in his company, and once again nothing had been found.

Yet, when I returned to the house in the valley, I was uneasy and troubled. I tried to keep awake and wait upon events, but this was not to be. I fell asleep, not in the bedroom, but in the storeroom, poring over that strange and terrible book in Seth Bishop's hand.

That night I dreamed again, for the first time since my initial dream.

And once again, I dreamed of a vast, amorphous being, which rose out of the water pit in the cavern beyond the passage under the house; but this time it was no misty emanation, this time it was horribly, shockingly real, built of flesh that seemed to have been created out of ancient rock, a vast mountain of matter surmounted by a neckless head, from the lower edges of which great tentacles writhed and curled, reaching out to singular lengths; this came rising out of the waters, while all around it flowed the Deep Ones in an ecstasy of adoration and subservience, and once again, as before, the weirdly beautiful music which had accompanied it rose, and a thousand batrachian throats called harshly *"Iä! Iä! Cthulhu fhtagn!"* in accents of worship.

And once again came the sound of great footfalls below the house, in the bowels of the earth. . . .

At this juncture I woke, and to my terror, heard still the subterranean footfalls, and felt the shuddering of the house and the earth in the valley, and heard distantly the incredible music fading away into the depths below the house. In my terror, I ran and burst from the house, running blindly to get away, only to face into still another danger.

Bud Perkins stood there, his rifle aimed at me.

"Where you think you're goin'?" he demanded.

I stopped running, not knowing what to say. Behind me, the house was silent.

"Nowhere," I said finally. Then, my curiosity overcoming my dislike of this gaunt neighbor, I asked, "Did you hear anything, Bud?"

"We all been hearin' it, night after night. Now we're guardin' our stock. You might as well know it. We don't aim to shoot, but if we have to, we'll do it."

"It's not my doing," I said.

" 'Tain't nobody else's," he answered laconically.

I could feel his animosity.

"That's the way it was when Seth Bishop was here. We ain't sure he's not still here."

I felt a curious coldness come over me at his words, and at that instant, the house behind me, for all its looming terrors, seemed more inviting than the darkness outside, where Bud and his neighbors stood vigil with weapons as lethal as anything I might find within those black walls. Perhaps Seth Bishop, too, had met this kind of hatred: perhaps the furniture had never been moved back into the house because it made a barrier against bullets.

I turned and went back into the house without a further word.

Inside, all was now quiet. There was not a sound anywhere. I had previously thought

it somewhat unusual that not a sign of mouse or rat had existed in the abandoned house, knowing how quickly these small animals take over a house; now I would have welcomed the sound of their scampering to and fro or gnawing. But there was nothing, only a deathly, pregnant stillness, as if the house itself knew it was ringed around with grim, determined men armed against a horror they could not know.

It was late when at last I slept that night.

IV

MY SENSE of time was not effective in those weeks, as I have already set down. If my memory now serves me rightly, there was a lull of almost a month after that night. I discovered that, gradually, the guards had been withdrawn; only Bud Perkins remained, and he stayed grimly night after night.

It must have been at least five weeks later when I woke from sleep one night and found myself in the passage below the house, walking toward the cellar, away from the yawning chasm at the far end. What had awakened me was a sound to which I was unaccustomed—a screaming which could have come only from a human voice, far behind me. I listened in cold horror, and yet somewhat lethargically, while the screams of fright rose and fell, and were cut off terribly at last. Then I stood for a long time in that place, unable to move forward or back, waiting for a resumption of that frightening sound. But it did not come again, and at last I made my way back to my room and fell exhausted on my bed.

I woke that next morning with a premonition of what was to come.

And in mid-morning, it came. A sullen, hateful mob of men and women, most of them armed. Fortunately, they were in charge of a deputy-sheriff, who kept them in a semblance of order. Though they had no search warrant, they demanded the right to search the house. In the face of their mood, it would have been folly to deny them; so I made no attempt to do so. I stepped outside and left the door stand open for them. They surged into the house, and I could hear them going through room after room, upstairs and down, moving and throwing things about. I made no protest, for I was stoutly guarded by three men, one of whom was Obed Marsh, the storekeeper from Aylesbury.

It was to him I finally addressed myself in as calm a voice as I could muster. "May I ask what this is all about?"

"You sayin' you don't know?" he asked scornfully.

"I don't."

"Jared More's boy disappeared last night. Walkin' home from a school party up the road a piece. He had to come by here."

There was nothing I could say. It was patent that they believed the boy had vanished into this house. However much I wanted to protest, I could not rid my thoughts of the memory of that terrible screaming I had heard in the tunnel. I did not know who had screamed, and I knew now that I did not want to learn. I felt reasonably sure that they would not find the entrance to the tunnel, for it was artfully concealed behind shelving in that small cellar space, but from that moment forward I stood in an agony of suspense, for I had little doubt about what would happen to me if by some chance anything belonging to the missing boy should be found on the premises.

But again a merciful Providence intervened to prevent any discovery—if there were one to be made; I dared to hope that my own fears were groundless. In truth, I did not know, but horrible doubts were now beginning to assail me. How came I in the tunnel? And whence? When I had awakened, I had been on the way back from the water's edge. What had I done there—and *had I left anything behind?*

By twos and threes, the mob came out of the house again, empty-handed. They were no less sullen, no less angry—but they were somewhat dubious and bewildered. If they had expected to find anything, they were sharply disappointed. If the missing boy had not been taken to the Bishop house, they could not imagine where he might have gone.

Urged by the deputy-sheriff, who had given them their way, they now drew back from the house and began to disperse, all

but Bud Perkins and a handful of equally grim men, who remained on guard.

Then for days I was aware of the oppressive hatred which was directed toward the Bishop house and its lone occupant.

Thereafter came an interval of comparative quiet.

And then that final catastrophic night!

IT BEGAN with faint intimations of something stirring below. I suppose I was subconsciously aware of movement even before I was conscious of it. At the time I was reading in that hellish manuscript book of Seth Bishop's—a page devoted to the minions of Great Cthulhu, the Deep Ones who devoured sacrifice of warm-blooded animals, being themselves cold-blooded, and waxing fat and strong on what would seem a kind of pagan cannibalism; I was reading this, I say, when without warning I became conscious of the stirrings below, as if the very earth were becoming animated, trembling faintly, rhythmically, and there began immediately thereafter a faint, far-away music, exactly similar to that which I had heard in my first dream in that house, rising from instruments unknown to human hands, but resembling a fluting or piping sound heard in chorus, and accompanied once more by an occasional ululation which came from the throat of some living entity.

I cannot adequately describe the effect which this had on me. At the moment, engrossed as I was in an account clearly related to the events of the past weeks, I was, as it were, conditioned to such an occurrence, but my state of mind was one of nothing short of exaltation, and I was filled with a compelling urgence to rise and serve Him who lay dreaming far below. Almost as in a dream, I put out the light in the storeroom, and slipped out in darkness, possessed by caution against the enemies who waited beyond the walls.

As yet, the music was too faint to be heard outside the house. I had no way of knowing how long it would remain so faint; so I made haste to do that which was expected of me before the enemy could be warned that the dwellers in the watery chasm below were once again rising toward the house in the valley. But it was not to the cellar that I moved. As if by pre-ordained plan, I slipped out the back door of the house and made my way stealthily in the darkness to the protecting shrubbery and trees.

There I began to make slow but steady progress forward. Somewhere up ahead Bud Perkins stood on guard. . . .

OF WHAT happened after that, I cannot be sure.

The rest was nightmare, certainly. Before I reached Bud Perkins, two shots rang out. That was his signal to the others to come. I was less than a foot away from him in the darkness, and his shots startled me out of my wits. He, too, had heard the sounds from below, for now I could hear them outside in this darkness as well.

So much I remember with reasonable clarity.

It was what happened after that that baffles me even now. Certainly the mob came, and if the men from the sheriff's office had not been waiting, too, I would not now be alive to make this deposition. I remember the screaming, furious mob; I remember that they set fire to the house. I had been back there, I had run out, escaping the flames. From where I looked back, I saw not only the flames, but that other sight—those shrilly crying Deep Ones, falling victim to flame and terror, and at the last that gigantic being which reared up out of the flames flailing its tentacles, before it dropped defiantly back down, compacting into a great sinuous column of flesh, and vanished without trace! It was then that someone in the mob threw dynamite into the flaming house. But even before the echo of the blast had died away, I heard, as did all the others encircling all that remained of the Bishop house, that chanting voice which cried, *"Ph'nglui mglw'nafh Cthulhu R'lyeh wgah'nagl fhtagn!"*—announcing to all the world that Great Cthulhu still lay dreaming in his subaqueous haven of R'lyeh!

They said of me that I was crouched beside the torn remains of Bud Perkins, and they intimated hideous things. Yet they must have seen, even as I saw, what writhed

in that flaming ruin, though they deny that there was anything at all there but myself. What they say I was doing is too horrible to repeat. It is the fiction of their diseased, hate-filled brains, for surely they cannot deny the evidence of their own senses. They witnessed against me in court, and sealed my doom.

Surely they must understand that it was not I who did all the things they say I did! Surely they must know that it was the life-force of Seth Bishop, which invaded and took possession of me, which again restored that unholy link to those creatures of the deeps, bringing them their food, as in the days when Seth Bishop had an existence in a body of his own and served them, even as the Deep Ones and those countless others scattered over the face of the earth, Seth Bishop who did what they say I did to Bud Perkins' sheep and Jared More's boy and all those missing animals and finally to Bud Perkins himself, for all that he made them believe it was I, for I could not have done such things, it was Seth Bishop come back from hell to serve again those hideous beings who came to his watery pit from the depths of the sea, Seth Bishop, who had discovered their existence and summoned them to do his bidding and who lived to serve them in his own time and in mine, and who may still lurk deep in earth below that place where the house stood in the valley, waiting for another vessel to inhabit and so serve them in time to come, forever.

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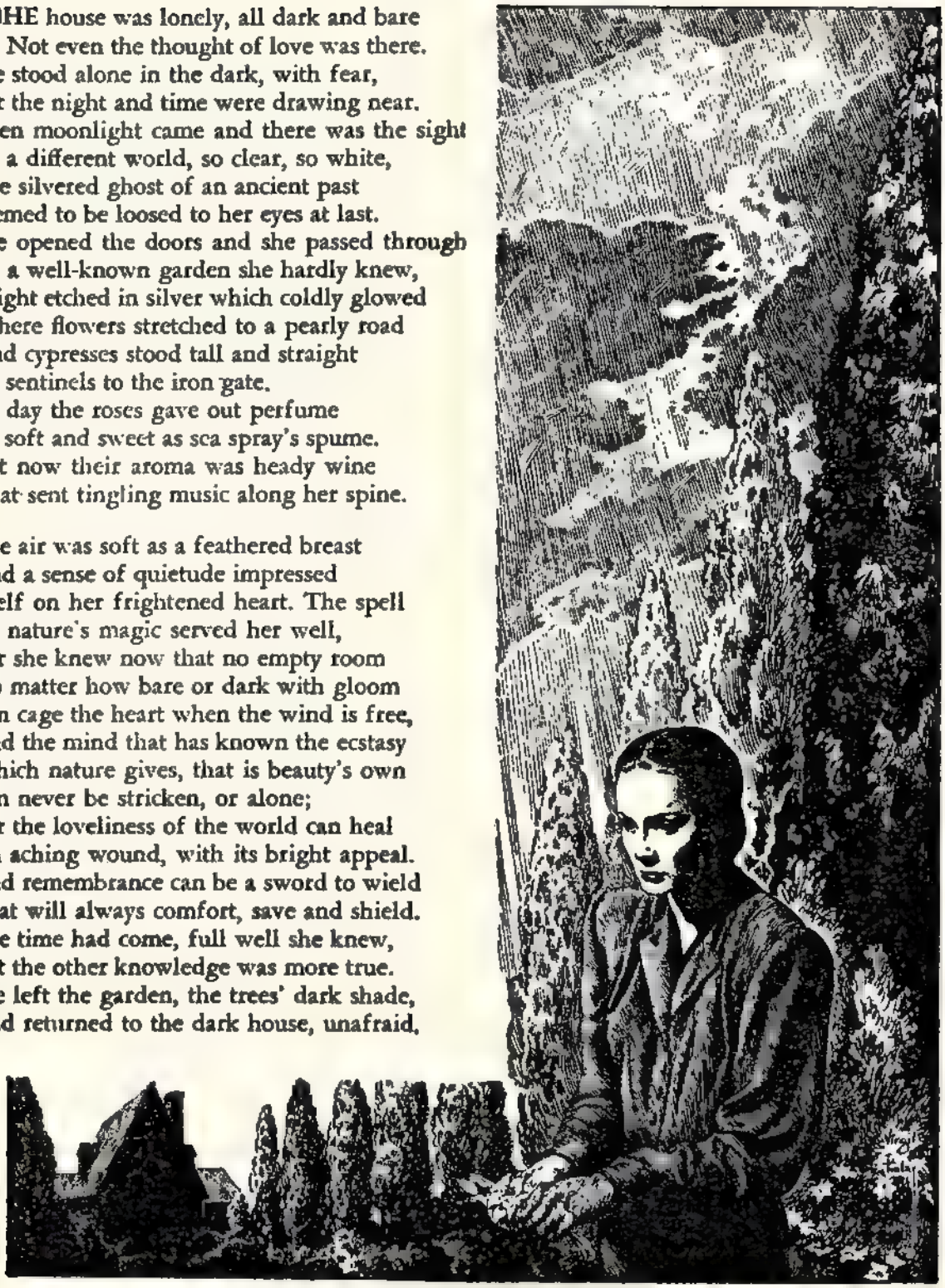
House of Life

By DOROTHY QUICK

THE house was lonely, all dark and bare
Not even the thought of love was there.
She stood alone in the dark, with fear,
For the night and time were drawing near.
Then moonlight came and there was the sight
Of a different world, so clear, so white,
The silvered ghost of an ancient past
Seemed to be loosed to her eyes at last.
She opened the doors and she passed through
To a well-known garden she hardly knew,
Bright etched in silver which coldly glowed
Where flowers stretched to a pearly road
And cypresses stood tall and straight
As sentinels to the iron gate.
By day the roses gave out perfume
As soft and sweet as sea spray's spume.
But now their aroma was heady wine
That sent tingling music along her spine.

The air was soft as a feathered breast
And a sense of quietude impressed
Itself on her frightened heart. The spell
Of nature's magic served her well,
For she knew now that no empty room
No matter how bare or dark with gloom
Can cage the heart when the wind is free,
And the mind that has known the ecstasy
Which nature gives, that is beauty's own
Can never be stricken, or alone;
For the loveliness of the world can heal
An aching wound, with its bright appeal.
And remembrance can be a sword to wield
That will always comfort, save and shield.
The time had come, full well she knew,
But the other knowledge was more true.
She left the garden, the trees' dark shade,
And returned to the dark house, unafraid.



EBERLE

Slaughter House

. . . permeated by a cruel and malignant vitality which tried to drink the life force from all who entered it.

I submit for your consideration, the following manuscript which was mailed to this office some weeks ago. It is presented with neither evidence nor judgment as to its validity. This determination is for the reader to make.

Samuel D. Machildon, *Associate Secretary, Rand Society for Psychical Research.*

I

THIS occurred many years ago. My brother Saul and I had taken a fancy to the old, tenantless Slaughter House. Since we were boys the yellow-edged pronouncement—*For Sale*—had hung lopsided in the grimy front window. We had vowed with boyish ambition that, when we were old enough, the sign must come down.

When we had attained our manhood, this

Heading by Joseph Eberle

by Richard Matheson

aspiration somehow remained. We had a taste for the Victorian, Saul and I. His painting was akin to that roseate and buxom transcription of nature so endeared by the nineteenth century artists. And my writing, though far from satisfactory realization, bore the definite stamp of prolixity, was marked by that meticulous sweep of ornate phrase which the modernists decry as dullness and artifice.

Thus, for the headquarters of our artistic labors, what better retreat than the Slaughter House, that structure which matched in cornice and frieze our intimate partialities? None, we decided, and acted readily on that decision.

The yearly endowment arranged by our deceased parents, albeit meager, we knew to suffice, since the house was in gross need of repair and, moreover, without electricity.

There was also, if hardly credited by us, a rumor of ghosts. Neighborhood children quite excelled each other in relating the harrowing experiences they had undergone with various of the more eminent spectres. We smiled at their clever fancies, never once losing the conviction that purchase of the house would be wholly practical and satisfactory.

The real estate office bumbled with financial delight the day we took off their hands what they had long considered a lost cause, having even gone so far as to remove the house from their listings. Convenient arrangements were readily fashioned and, in a matter of hours, we had moved all belongings from our uncommodious flat to our new, relatively large, house.

Several days were then spent in the most necessary task of cleaning. This presented itself as far more difficult a project than first anticipated. Dust lay heavy throughout the halls and rooms. Our energetic dusting would send clouds of it billowing expansively, filling the air with powdery ghosts of dirt. We noted in respect to that observation that many a spectral vision might thus be made explicable if the proper time were utilized in experiment.

In addition to dust on all places of lodgement, there was thick grime on glass surfaces ranging from downstairs windows to silver-scratched mirrors in the upstairs bath. There were loose bannisters to repair, door locks to recondition, yards of thick rugging out of whose mat to beat decades of dust, and a multitude of other chores large and small to be performed before the house could be deemed livable.

Yet, even with grime and age admitted, that we had come by an obvious bargain was beyond dispute. The house was completely furnished, moreover furnished in the delightful mode of the early 1900's. Saul and I were thoroughly enchanted. Dusted, aired, scrubbed from top to bottom, the house proved indeed a fascinating purchase. The dark luxurious drapes, the patterned rugs, the graceful furniture, the yellow-keyed spinet; everything was complete to the last detail, that detail being the portrait of a rather lovely young woman which hung above the living room mantel.

When first we came upon it, Saul and I stood speechless before its artistic quality. Saul then spoke of the painter's technique and finally, in rapt adulation, discussed with me the various possibilities as to the identity of the model.

It was our final conjecture that she was the daughter or wife of the former tenant, whoever he had been, beyond having the name of Slaughter.

SEVERAL weeks passed by. Initial delight was slaked by full-time occupancy and intense creative effort.

We rose at nine, had our breakfast in the dining room, then proceeded to our work, I in my sleeping chamber, Saul in the solarium which we had been able to improvise into a small studio. Each in our places, the morning passed quietly and effectively. We lunched at one, a small but nourishing meal and then resumed work for the afternoon.

We discontinued our labors about four to have tea and quiet conversation in our elegant front room. By this hour it was too late to go on with our work, since darkness would be commencing its surrounding pall on the city. We had chosen not to install electricity both for reasons of monetary prudence and the less sordid one of pure esthetics.

We would not, for the world, have distorted the gentle charm of the house by the

addition of blatant, sterile electric light. Indeed we preferred the flickering silence of candlelight in which to play our nightly game of bridge. We needed no usurping of our silence by noxious radio bleatings, we ate our bakery bread unsinged and found our wine quite adequately cooled from the old icebox. Saul enjoyed the sense of living in the past and so did I. We asked no more.

But then began the little things, the intangible things, the things without reason.

Walking on the stairs, in the hallway, through the rooms, Saul or I, singly or together, would stop and receive the strangest impulse in our minds. Of fleeting moment yet quite definite while existent.

It is difficult to express the feeling with adequate clarity. It was as if we heard something although there was no sound, as though we saw something when there was nothing before the eye. A sense of shifting presence, delicate and tenuous, hidden from all physical senses and yet, somehow, perceived.

There was no explaining it. In point of fact we never spoke of it together. It was too nebulous a feeling to discuss, incapable of being materialized into words. Restless though it made us, there was no mutual comparison of sensation nor could there be. Even the most abstract of thought formation could not approach what we were experiencing.

Sometimes I would come upon Saul casting a hurried glance over his shoulder or, surreptitiously reaching out to stroke empty air as though he expected his fingers to touch some invisible entity. Sometimes he would catch me doing the same. On occasion we would smile awkwardly, both of us appreciating the moment without words.

But our smiles soon faded. I almost think we were afraid to deride this unknown aegis for fear that it might prove itself actual. Not that my brother or I were superstitious in the least degree. The very fact that we purchased the house without paying the slightest feasance to the old wives tales about its supposed anathema seems to belie the suggestion that we were, in any manner, inclined toward mystic apprehensions. Yet

the house did seem, beyond question, to possess some strange potency.

Often, late at night, I would lie awake, knowing somehow that Saul was also awake in his room and that we both were listening and waiting, consciously certain about our expectation of some unknown arrival which was soon to be effected.

And effected it was.

II

IT WAS perhaps a month and a half after we had moved into Slaughter House that the first hint was shown as to the house's occupants other than ourselves.

I was in the narrow kitchen cooking supper on the small gas stove. Saul was in the dining alcove arranging the table for supper. He had spread a white cloth over the dark, glossy mahogany and, on it, placed two plates with attendant silver. A candelabra of six candles glowed in the center of the table casting wavering shadows over the snowy cloth.

Saul was about to place the cups and saucers beside the plates as I turned back to the stove. I twisted the knob a trifle to lower the flame under the chops. Then, as I began to open the icebox to get the wine, I heard Saul gasp loudly and, something thumped on the dining room rug. I whirled and hurried out of the kitchen as fast as I could.

One of the cups had fallen to the floor, its handle snapping off. I hurriedly picked it up, my eyes on Saul.

He was standing with his back to the living room archway, his right hand pressed to his cheek, a look of speechless shock contorting his handsome features.

"What is it?" I asked, placing the cup on the table.

He looked at me without answering and I noticed how his slender fingers trembled on his whitening cheek.

"Saul, what *is* it?"

"A hand," he said. "A hand. *It touched my cheek.*"

I believe my mouth fell open in surprise. I had, deep within the inner passages of mind, been expecting something like this to happen. So had Saul. Yet now that it had, a natural sense of oppressive impact was on both of our shoulders.

We stood there in silence. How can I express my feeling at that moment? It was as though something tangible, a tide of choking air, crept over us like some shapeless, lethargic serpent. I noticed how Saul's chest moved in convulsive leaps and depressions and my own mouth hung open as I gasped for breath.

Then, in an added moment, the breathless vacuum was gone, the mindless dread dissolved. I managed to speak, trusting to break this awesome spell with words.

"Are you sure?" I asked.

His slender throat contracted. He forced a smile to his lips, a smile more frightened than pleasant.

"I hope not," he replied.

He reinforced his smile with some effort.

"Can it really be?" he went on, his joviality failing noticeably, "Can it really be that we've been duped into buying ourselves a haunted house?"

I maintained an effort to join in with his spirit of artificial gusto for the sake of our own minds. But it could not long last nor did I feel any abiding comfort in Saul's feigned composure. We were both exceptionally hypersensitive, had been ever since our births, mine some twenty-seven years before and his, twenty-five. We both felt this bodiless premonition deep in our senses.

We spoke no more of it, whether from distaste or foreboding I cannot say. Following our unenjoyable meal, we spent the remainder of the evening at pitifully conducted card games. I suggested, in one unguarded moment of fear, that it might be worth our consideration to have electrical outlets installed in the house.

Saul scoffed at my apparent submission and seemed a little more content to retain the relative dimness of candlelight than the occurrence before dinner would have seemed to make possible in him. Notwithstanding that, I made no issue of it.

WE RETIRED to our rooms quite early as we usually do. Before we separated, however, Saul said something quite odd to my way of thinking. He was standing at

the head of the stairs looking down, I was about to open the door to my room.

"Doesn't it all seem familiar?" he asked.

I turned to face him, hardly knowing what he was talking about.

"Familiar?" I asked of him.

"I mean," he tried to clarify, "As though we'd been here before. No, more than just been here. Actually *lived* here."

I looked at him with a disturbing sense of alarm gnawing at my mind. He lowered his eyes with a nervous smile as though he'd said something he was just realizing he should not have said. He stepped off quickly for his room muttering a most uncordial good night to me.

I then retired to my own room wondering about the unusual restlessness which had seemed to possess Saul throughout the evening manifesting itself not only in his words but in his impatient card play, his fidgety pose on the chair upon which he sat, the agitated flexing of his fingers, the roving of his beautiful dark eyes about the living-room. As though he were looking for something.

In my room, I disrobed, effected my toilet and was soon in bed. I had lain there about an hour when I felt the house shake momentarily and the air seemed abruptly permeated with a weird, discordant humming that made my brain throb.

I pressed my hands over my ears and then seemed to wake up, my ears still covered. The house was still. I was not at all sure that it had not been a dream. It might have been a heavy truck passing the house, thus setting the dream into motion in my upset mind. I had no way of being absolutely certain.

I sat up and listened. For long minutes I sat stock still on my bed and tried to hear if there were any sounds in the house. A burglar perhaps or Saul prowling about in quest of a midnight snack. But there was nothing. Once, while I glanced at the window, I thought I saw, out of the corner of my eye, a momentary glare of bluish light shining underneath my door. But, when I quickly turned my head, my eyes saw only the deepest of blackness and, at length, I sank back on my pillow and fell into a faithful sleep.

III

THE next day was Sunday. Frequent wakings during the night and light, troubled sleep had exhausted me. I remained in bed until ten-thirty although it was my general habit to rise promptly at nine each day, a habit I had acquired when quite young.

I dressed hastily and walked across the hall, but Saul was already up. I felt a slight vexation that he had not come in to speak to me as he sometimes did nor even looked in to tell me it was past rising time.

I found him in the living room eating breakfast from a small table he had placed in front of the mantel piece. He was sitting in a chair that faced the portrait.

His head moved around quickly as I came in. He appeared nervous to me.

"Good morning," he said.

"Why didn't you wake me up?" I said, "You know I never sleep this late."

"I thought you were tired," he said. "What difference does it make?"

I sat down across from him, feeling rather peevish as I took a warm biscuit from beneath the napkin and broke it open.

"Did you notice the house shaking last night?" I asked.

"No. Did it?"

I made no reply to the flippant air of his counter-question. I took a bite from my biscuit and put it down.

"Coffee?" he said. I nodded curtly and he poured me a cup, apparently oblivious to my pique.

I looked around the table.

"Where is the sugar?" I asked.

"I never use it," he answered, "You know that."

"*I* use it," I said.

"Well, you weren't up, John," he replied with an antiseptic smile.

I rose abruptly and went into the kitchen. I opened up one side of the cabinet and retrieved the sugar bowl with irritable fingers.

Then, as I passed it, about to leave the room, I tried to open the other side of the cabinet. It would not open. The door had been stuck quite fast since we moved in. Saul and I had decided in facetious keeping with neighborhood tradition that the cabinet

contained shelf upon shelf of dehydrated ghosts.

At the moment, however, I was in little humor for droll fancies. I pulled at the door knob with rising anger. That I should suddenly insist on that moment to open the cabinet only reflected the ill-temper Saul's neglect could so easily create in me. I put down the sugar bowl and placed both hands on the knob.

"What on earth are you doing?" I heard Saul ask from the front room.

I made no answer to his question but pulled the harder on the cabinet knob. But it was as if the door were imbedded solidly into the frame and I could not loosen it the least fraction of an inch.

"What were you doing?" Saul asked as I sat down.

"Nothing," I said and the matter ended. I sat eating with little if any appetite. I do not know whether I felt more anger than hurt. Perhaps it was more a sense of injury since Saul is usually keenly sensitive to my responses, but that day he seemed not the slightest particle receptive. And it was that blase dispassion in him, so different from his usual disposition, that had so thoroughly upset me.

Once, during the meal, I glanced up at him to discover that his eyes were directed over my shoulder, focusing on something behind me. It caused a distinct chill to excite itself across my back.

"What are you looking at?" I asked of him.

His eyes re-focused themselves on me and the slight smile he held was erased from his lips.

"Nothing," he replied.

None the less I twisted about in my chair to look. But there was only the portrait over the mantel and nothing more.

"The portrait?" I asked.

He made no answer but stirred his coffee with deceptive composure.

I said, "Saul, I'm talking to you."

His dark eyes on me were mockingly cold. As though they meant to say, Well, so you are but that is hardly a concern of mine, is it?

When he would not speak I chose to attempt an alleviation of this inexplicable tension which had risen between us. I put down my cup.

"Did you sleep well?" I asked.

His gaze moved up to me quickly, almost, I could not avoid the realization, almost suspiciously.

"Why do you ask?" he spoke distrustingly.

"Is it such an odd question?"

Again he made no reply. Instead he patted his thin lips with his napkin and pushed back his chair as though to leave.

"Excuse me," he muttered, more from habit than politeness, I sensed.

"Why are you being so mysterious?" I asked with genuine concern.

He was on his feet, ready to move away, his face virtually blank.

"I'm not," he said, "You're imagining things."

I simply could not understand this sudden alteration in him nor relate it to any equivalent cause. I stared incredulously at him as he turned away and began walking toward the hallway with short, impatient steps.

He turned left to pass through the archway and I heard his quick feet jumping up the carpeted steps. I sat there unable to move, looking at the spot from which he had just disappeared.

It was only after a long while that I turned once more to examine the portrait more carefully.

There seemed nothing unusual about it. My eyes moved over the well-formed shoulders to the slender, white throat, the chin, the cupid-bowed red lips, the delicately upturned nose, the frank green eyes. I had to shake my head. It was only the portrait of a woman and no more. How could this affect any man of sense? How could it affect Saul?

I COULD not finish my coffee but let it stand cold on the table. I rose, pushed back my chair and started upstairs. I went directly to my brother's room and turned the knob to enter, then felt a stiffening in my body as I realized he had locked himself in. I turned away from his door, tight-lipped and thoroughly annoyed, disturbed beyond control.

As I sat in my room most of the day, sporadically reading, I listened for his footsteps in the hall. I tried to reason out the situation in my mind, to resolve this alien transformation in his attitude toward me.

But there seemed no resolution save that of assuming headache, imperfect sleep, or other equally dissatisfying explanations. They served not at all to decipher his uneasiness, the foreign way in which his eye regarded me, his marked disinclination to speak civilly.

It was then, against my will I must state clearly, that I began to suspect other than ordinary causes and to yield a momentary credence to local accounts of the house in which we lived. We had not spoken of that hand he had felt, but was it because we believed it was imagination or because we knew it wasn't?

Once during the afternoon, I stood in the hallway with closed eyes, listening intently as though I meant to capture some particular sound and ferret it out. In the deep quiet I stood wavering back and forth on the floor, the very stillness ringing in my ears.

I heard nothing. And the day passed with slow, lonely hours. Saul and I had a morose supper together during which he rejected all extended conversation and multiple offers of card games and chess during the later evening.

After he had finished his meal, he returned immediately to his room and I, after washing the dishes, returned to mine and soon retired.

The dream returned again, yet not in certainty a dream, I thought lying there in the early morning. And had it not been a dream only a hundred trucks could have made such a vibration as that which shook the house in my fancy. And the light which shone beneath the door was too bright for candlelight, a glaring blue lucency of illumination. And the footsteps I heard were very audible. Were they only in my dream however? I could not be sure.

IV

IT WAS nearly nine-thirty before I rose and dressed, strongly irritated that my work schedule was being thus altered by concern. I completed my toilet quickly and went out into the hall, anxious to lose myself in occupation.

Then, as I looked automatically toward Saul's room I noticed that the door was slightly ajar. I immediately assumed he was already up and at work above in the solarium, so I did not stop to see. Instead, I hurried downstairs to make myself a hasty breakfast, noticing as I entered the kitchen that the room was just as I had left it the night before.

After a moderate breakfast I went upstairs again and entered Saul's room.

It was with some consternation that I found him still on his bed. I say on rather than in since the blankets and sheets had been, and violently so, it appeared, thrown aside and were hanging down in twisted swirls upon the wooden floor.

Saul lay on the bottom sheet, clad only in pajama trousers, his chest, shoulders and face dewed with tiny drops of perspiration.

I bent over and shook him once, but he only mumbled in sleep-ridden lethargy. I shook him again with hardened fingers and he rolled over angrily.

"Leave me alone," he spoke in thickened irritability. "You know I've been . . ."

He stopped, as though, once more, he was about to speak of something he should not.

"You've been what?" I inquired, feeling a rising heat of aggravation in my system.

He said nothing but lay there on his stomach, his face buried in the white pillow.

I reached down and shook him again by the shoulder, this time more violently. At this he pushed up abruptly and almost screamed at me.

"Get out of here!"

"Are you going to paint?" I asked shaking nervously.

He rolled on his side and squirmed a little, preparatory to sleeping again. I turned away with a harsh breath of anger.

"You make your own breakfast," I said, feeling yet more fury at the senseless import of my words. As I pulled shut the door in leaving I thought I heard Saul laughing.

I went back to my room and started to work on my play though hardly with suc-

cess. My brain could not grasp concentration. All I could think of was the uncommon way in which my pleasant life had been usurped.

Saul and I had always been exceptionally close to one another. Our lives had always been inseparable, our plans were always mutual plans, our affections invariably directed primarily upon each other. This had been so since our boyhood when in grade school other children laughingly called us The Twins in contraction of our fuller title —The Siamese Twins. And, even though I had been two years ahead of Saul in school, we were always together, choosing our friends with a regard to each other's tastes and distastes, living, in short, with and for each other.

Now this; this enraging schism in our relationship. This harsh severance of comradely association, this abrupt, painful transmutation from intimacy to callous inattention.

The change was of such a gravity to me that almost immediately I began to look for the most grave of causes. And, although the implied solution seemed at the very least tenuous, I could not help but entertain it willingly. And, once more entertained, I could not remove myself from the notion.

In the quiet of my room, I pondered of ghosts.

Was it then possible that the house was haunted? Hastily I mulled over the various implications, the various intimations that the theory was verifiable.

EXCLUDING the possibility that they were dream content, there were heaving vibrations and the weird, high-pitched humming which had assailed my brain. There was the eerie blue light I had dreamed or actually seen beneath my door. And, finally, the most damning of evidence, there was Saul's statement that he had felt a hand on his cheek. *A cold, damp hand!*

Yet, despite all, it is a difficult thing to admit the existence of ghosts in a coldly factual world. One's very instincts rebel at the admission of such maddening possibility. For, once the initial step is made into the supernatural, there is no turning back, no knowing where the strange road leads except that it is quite unknown and quite terrible.

So actual were the premonitions I began to feel that I put aside my unused writing tablet and pen and rushed into the hall and to Saul's room as though something were awry there.

The ludicrous, unexpected sound of his snoring set me momentarily at ease. But my smile was short-lived, vanishing instantly when I saw the half-empty liquor bottle on his bedside table.

The shock of it made my flesh grow cold. And the thought came—he is corrupted, although I had no knowledge of its source.

As I stood there above his spread-eagled form, he groaned once and turned on his back. He had dressed, but his slept-in attire was now disheveled and crumpled. His face, I noted, was unshaven and extremely haggard and the bloodshot gaze he directed at me was that of one stranger to another.

"What do you want?" he asked in hoarse, unnatural tones.

"Are you out of your mind?" I said, "What in God's name . . . ?"

"Get out of here," he said again to me, his brother.

I stared at his face and, although I knew it could be only the result of drink distorting his unshaven features, I could not dispel the apprehension that he was, somehow, coarse, and a shudder of strange revulsion ran through me.

I was about to take the bottle away from him when he swung at me, a wildly inaccurate flinging of the arm, his sense of direction blunted by a drink thickened brain.

"I said, get *out* of here!" he shouted in a fury, streaks of mottled red leaping into his cheeks.

I backed away, almost in fright, then turned on my heel and hurried into the hall, trembling with the shock of my brother's unnatural behavior. I stood outside his door for a long time, listening to him toss restlessly on his bed, groaning. And I felt close to tears.

Then, without thought, I descended the darkening stairway, moved across the living room and dining alcove and entered the

small kitchen. There, in the black silence, I held aloft a spluttering match and then lit the heavy candle I retrieved from the stove.

My footsteps, as I moved about the kitchen, seemed oddly muffled, as though I were hearing them through thick, cotton padding in my ears. And I began to get the most incongruous sensation that the very silence was drumming roughly in my ears.

As I passed the left hand side of the cabinet I found myself swaying heavily as though the dead, motionless air had suddenly become mobile and were buffeting me about. The silence was a roaring now and, suddenly, I clutched out for support and my twitching fingers knocked a dish onto the tile floor.

A positive shudder ran through me then because the sound of the breaking dish had been hollow and unreal, the sound of something greatly distant. If I had not seen the porcelain fragments lying on the dark tile I might have sworn the dish had not shattered at all.

With a sense of mounting restlessness I pushed my index fingers into my ears and twisted them around as if to ease what seemed an obstruction. Then I clenched my fist and struck the fastened cabinet door, almost desperate for the comfort of logical sound. But no matter how strong my blows, the sound came to my ears no louder than that of someone far away knocking at some door.

I turned hastily to the small icebox, very anxious now to make my sandwiches and coffee and be out of there, up in my room once more.

I put the bread on a tray, poured a cupful of the steaming black coffee and put the coffee pot down on its burner again. Then, with distinct trepidation, I bent over and blew out the candle.

The dining alcove and living room were oppressively dark now. My heart began to thud heavily as I moved across the rug, my footsteps muffled as I walked. I held the tray in stiff, unfeeling fingers, my gaze directed straight ahead. As I moved, my breath grew more harsh, bursting from my nostrils as I held my lips pressed tightly together lest they begin shaking with fright.

THE blackness and the dead, utter silence seemed to crush in on me like solid walls. I held my throat stiff, my every muscle suspended by will for fear that relaxation would cause me to shake without control.

Halfway to the hall I heard it.

A soft, bubbling laughter which seemed to permeate the room like a cloud of sound.

A swamping wave of coldness covered my body and my footsteps halted abruptly as my legs and body stiffened.

The laughter did not cease. It continued, moving about me as if someone—or some *thing*—circled me on soundless tread, its eyes always on me. I began to tremble and, in the stillness, I could hear the rattling of the cup on my tray.

Then, suddenly, a damp, cold hand pressed against my cheek!

With a terrified howl of fear I dropped the tray and ran wildly into the hall and up the stairs, my weakening legs propelling me forward in the blackness. As I ran there was another gush of liquid laughter behind me, like a thin trail of icy air in the stillness.

I locked the door to my room and hurled myself on the bed, pulling the bedspread over myself with shaking fingers. My eyes tightly shut I lay there with heart pounding against the mattress. And, in my mind, the hideous cognition that all my fears were justified was a knife stabbing at delicate tissues.

It was all true.

As actually as if a living human hand had touched me, I had felt that cold and soggy hand on my cheek. But what living person was down there in the darkness?

For a short time I belied to tell myself it had been Saul executing a cruel and vicious joke. But I knew it had not been, for I would have heard his footsteps and I had heard none, either before or now.

The clock was chiming ten when I was at last able to summon the courage to throw off the spread, scrabble for the box of matches on my bedside table and light the candle.

At first the guttering light assuaged fear slightly. But then I saw how little it illuminated the silent darkness and I avoided,

with a shudder, the sight of huge and shapeless shadows quivering with gelatinous deformity on the walls. I cursed the old house for its lack of electricity. Fear might be eased in blazing lamplight. As it was, the imperfect flickering of that tiny flame did nothing to allay my fears.

I wanted to go across the hall and see if Saul were all right. But I was afraid to open my door, imagining hideous apparitions lurking there in the blackness, hearing once more in my mind the ugly, viscid laughter. I hoped that Saul was so hopelessly under alcoholic influence that nothing short of an earthquake could awaken him.

And, though I yearned to be near him even if he were treating me faithlessly, I felt no courage whatsoever. And, quickly undressing, I hastened to my bed and buried my head beneath the blankets again.

V

I AWOKE suddenly, shivering and afraid. The bedclothes were gone from my body, the black silence as awful as it had been earlier in the night.

I reached for the blankets anxiously, my fingers groping for them. They had fallen from the edge of the bed. I rolled on my side hurriedly and reached down, my fingers recoiling as they came in contact with the icy floorboards.

Then, as I reached for the blankets, I saw the light beneath the door.

It remained in sight only the fragment of a second but I knew I had seen it. And, as it passed abruptly from my eyes, the throbbing began. My room seemed filled with the humming pulsations. I could feel the bed shaking beneath me and my skin growing taut and frigid; my teeth chattering together.

Then the light appeared again and I heard the sound of bare feet and knew it was Saul walking in the night.

Driven more by fear for his safety than by courage, I threw my legs over the side of the bed and padded to the door, shuddering at the iciness of the flooring beneath my soles.

Slowly I opened the door, my body held tight in anticipation of what I might see.

But the hall was pitch black and I walked out and over to the door of Saul's room, listening to see if I could hear the sound of his breathing. But before I could judge anything, the hall below was suddenly illumined with that unearthy blue glow and I turned and rushed, again instinctively, to the head of the stairs and stood there clutching the old bannister, staring down.

Below, an aura of intensely brilliant blue light was passing through the hall moving in the direction of the living room.

My heart leaped! Saul was following it, arms ahead of him in the familiar pose of the somnambulist, his eyes staring ahead and glittering in the shapeless blue effulgence.

I tried to call his name but found that my voice could make no utterance. I tried to move for the stairs to wrest my Saul away from this terror. But a wall, invisible in the blackness, held me back. It grew close and airless. I struggled violently but it was to no avail. My muscles were strengthless against the horrible, impossible power that clutched me.

Then, suddenly, my nostrils and brain were assaulted by a pungent, sickly odor that made my senses reel. My throat and stomach burned with almost tangible fire. The darkness grew more intense. It seemed to cling to me like hot, black mud, constricting my chest so that I could hardly breathe. It was like being buried alive in a black oven, my body bound and rebound with heavy grave wrappings. I trembled, sobbing and ineffectual.

Then, abruptly, it all passed and I stood there in the cold hallway soaked with perspiration, weak from my frantic efforts. I tried to move but could not, tried to remember Saul, but was incapable of preventing the thought of him from slipping from my numbed brain. I shivered and turned to go back to my room but, at the first step, my legs buckled and I pitched forward heavily on the floor. The icy surface of it pressed against my flesh and, my body wracked by shivering, I lost consciousness.

WHEN my eyes opened again I still lay crumpled on the cold floor.

I rose to a sitting position, the hall be-

fore my eyes wavering in alternate tides of light and darkness. My chest felt tight and a remorseless chill gripped my body. I pulled myself up to a bent-over stance and staggered to Saul's room, a cough burning in my throat as I stumbled across the floor and against his bed.

He was there and looked emaciated. He was unshaved and the dark wiry growth on his skin seemed like some repugnant growth. His mouth was open and emitting sounds of exhausted slumber and his smooth, white chest rose and fell with shallow movements.

He made no motion as I tugged weakly at his shoulder. I spoke his name and was shocked at the hoarse, grating sound of my own voice. I spoke it again, and he stirred with a grumble and opened one eye to look at me.

"I'm sick," I muttered, "Saul, I'm sick."

He rolled on one side, turning on his back to me. A sob of anguish tore at my throat.

"Saul!"

He seemed to snap his body around insanely then, his hands clenched into bony, white fists at his sides.

"Get out of here!" he screamed, "Leave me alone or I'll kill you!"

The body-shaking impact of his words drove me back from the bed to where I stood dumbly staring at him, breath stabbing at my throat. I saw him toss his body back over as if he wanted to break it. And I heard him mutter to himself miserably, *"Why does the day have to last so long?"*

A spasm of coughing struck me then and, my chest aching with fiery pains, I struggled back to my own room and got into bed with the movements of an old man. I fell back on the pillow and pulled up the blankets, then lay there shivering and helpless.

There I slept all day in spasmodic periods offset by waking moments of extreme pain. I was unable to rise to get myself food or water. All I could do was lie there, shaking and weeping. I felt beaten as much by Saul's cruelty to me as by the physical suffering. And the pain in my body was extremely severe. So much so that during one seizure

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of coughing it was so awful I began to cry like a child, hitting the mattress with weak, ineffective fists and kicking my legs deliriously.

Yet, even then, I think I wept for more than the pain. I wept for my only brother who loved me not.

It seemed that night came more swiftly than I had ever seen it come before. I lay alone in the darkness praying through mute lips that no harm should come to him.

I SLEPT a while and then, abruptly, I was awake, staring at the light beneath the door, hearing the high-pitched humming in my ears. And I realized in that moment that Saul still loved me but that the house had corrupted his love.

And from this knowledge came resolution, from despair I gained amazing heart. I struggled to my feet and swayed there dizzily until the streaks before my eyes dispersed. Then I put on my robe and slippers, went to the door and threw it open.

What made things happen as they did I cannot say. Perhaps it was my feeling of courage that caused the black obstruction in the hall to melt before me. The house was trembling with the vibrations and the humming. Yet they seemed to lessen as I moved down the stairway and, all of a sudden, the blue light vanished from the living room and I heard loud and furious rumblings there.

When I entered, the room was in its usual order. A candle was burning on the mantel. But my eyes were riveted to the center of the floor.

Saul stood there, half naked and motionless, his body poised as though he were dancing, his eyes fastened to the portrait.

I spoke his name sharply. His eyes blinked and, slowly, his head turned to me. He didn't seem to comprehend my presence there for, suddenly, his glance flew about the room and he cried out in despairing tones:

"Come back! Come back!"

I called his name again and he stopped looking around but directed his gaze at me. His face was gaunt and cruelly lined in the flickering candlelight. It was the face of a lunatic. He gnashed his teeth together and started to move toward me.

"I'll kill you," he muttered in liquid tones, "I'll *kill* you."

I backed away.

"Saul, you're out of your mind. You don't . . ."

I could say no more for he rushed at me, his hands extended as if he would clutch at my throat. I tried to step aside but he grabbed hold of my robe and pulled me against him.

We began to struggle, I begging him to throw off this terrible spell he was under, he panting and gnashing his teeth. My head was being shaken from side to side and I saw our monstrous shadows heaving on the walls.

Saul's grip was not his own. I have always been stronger than he but, at that moment, his hands seemed like cold iron. I began to choke and his face blurred before my eyes. I lost balance and we both fell heavily to the floor. I felt the prickly rug against my cheek, his cold hands tightening on my throat.

Then my hand came in contact with something cold and hard. It was the tray I had dropped the night before, I realized. I gripped it and, realizing that he was out of his mind and meant to kill me, I picked it up and drove it across his head with all the power I had remaining.

It was a heavy metal tray and Saul sank to the floor as if struck dead, his hands slipping from my bruised throat. I struggled up, gasping for breath, and looked at him.

Blood was running from a deep gash in his forehead where the edge of the tray had struck.

"Saul!" I screamed, horrified at what I'd done.

Frantically I leaped up and rushed to the front door. As I flung it open I saw a man walking by in the street. I ran to the porch railing and called to him.

"Help!" I cried, "Call an ambulance!"

The man lurched and looked over at me with startled fright.

"For God's sake!" I beseeched him. "My brother has struck his head! Please call an ambulance!"

For a long moment he stared at me, open-mouthed, then broke into a nervous flight up the street. I called after him but he

would not stop to listen. I was certain he would not do as I'd asked.

AS I turned back, I saw my bloodless face in the hall mirror and realized with a start that I must have frightened the wits out of the man. I felt weak and afraid again, the momentary strength sapped from me. My throat was dry and raw, my stomach on edge. I was barely able to walk back to the living room on trembling stalks of legs.

I tried to lift Saul to a couch but dead weight was too much for me and I sank to my knees beside him. My body slumped forward and, half crouched, half lay by the side of my brother. The harsh sound of my breathing was the only sound I could hear. My left hand stroked Saul's hair absently and quiet tears flowed from my eyes.

I cannot say how long I had been there when the throbbing began again; as if to show me that it hadn't really gone away.

I still crouched there like a dead thing, my brain almost in coma. I could feel my heart beating like some old clock in my chest, the dull-edged and muffled pendulum hitting against my ribs with a lifeless rhythm. All sound registered with similar force, the clock on the mantel, my heart and the endless throbbing; all blending into one horrible beat that became a part of me, that became *me*. I could sense myself sinking deeper and deeper as a drowning man slips helplessly beneath the silent waters.

Then I thought I heard a tapping of feet through the room, the rustling of skirts and, far off, a hollow laughter of women.

I raised my head abruptly, my skin tight and cold.

A figure in white stood in the doorway.

It began to move toward me and I rose with a strangled cry on my lips only to collapse into darkness.

VI

WHAT I had seen had been not a ghost but an interne from the hospital. The man I had called in the street had, apparently, done what I'd asked. It will give some indication of the state I was in when I reveal that I heard neither the ringing of the front door bell nor the pounding of the interne's fist on the half-open door. Indeed, had the door not been open, I am certain that I would be dead now.

They took Saul to the hospital to have his head cared for. There being nothing wrong with me but nervous exhaustion, I remained in the house. I had wanted to go with Saul, but was told that the hospital was overcrowded and I would do more good by staying home in bed.

I slept late the next morning, rising about eleven. I went downstairs and had a substantial breakfast, then returned to my room and slept a few hours more. About two, I had some lunch. I planned to leave the house well before darkness fell to make sure nothing further happened to me. I could find a room in a hotel. It was clear that we would have to desert the place regardless of the fact that we sold it or not. I anticipated some trouble with Saul on that point but made up my mind to stand firm on my decision.

About five o'clock I dressed and left my room, carrying a small bag for the night. The day was almost gone and I hurried down the stairs, not wishing to remain in the house any longer. At the bottom of the staircase I stepped across the entry hall and closed my hand over the door knob.

The door would not open.

At first I would not allow myself to believe this. I stood there tugging, trying to combat the cold numbness that was spreading itself over my body. Then I dropped my bag and pulled at the knob with both hands but to no avail. It was as securely fastened as the cabinet door in the kitchen.

Suddenly, I turned from the door and ran into the living room but all the windows were jammed fast into their frames. I looked around the room, whimpering like a child, feeling unspoken hate for myself for letting myself be trapped again. I cursed loudly and, as I did, a cold wind lifted the hat from my head and hurled it across the floor.

Abruptly, I placed my shaking hands over my eyes and stood there trembling violently, afraid of what might happen any second, my heart hammering against my chest. The room seemed to chill markedly and I heard that grotesque humming noise again that came as if from another world. It sounded

like laughter to me, laughter that mocked me for my poor, feeble efforts to escape.

Then, with equal suddenness, I remembered Saul again, remembered that he needed me and I pulled away my hands from my eyes and screamed aloud,

"Nothing in this house can harm me!"

Sudden cessation of the sound gave me added courage. If my will could successfully defy the ungodly powers of the place, then perhaps it could also destroy them. If I went upstairs, if I slept in Saul's bed, then I too would know what he had experienced and thus be enabled to help him.

I felt no lack of confidence in my will to resist, never once stopping to think that my ideas might not be my own.

Quickly, two steps at a time, I rushed up the stairs and into my brother's room. There I quickly removed my hat, overcoat and suitcoat, loosened my tie and collar and sat down on the bed. Then, after a moment, I lay down and looked up at the darkening ceiling. I tried to keep my eyes open but, still fatigued, I soon fell asleep.

IT SEEMED only a moment before I was fully awake, my body tingling with sensations of not unpleasant character. I could not understand the strangeness of it. The darkness seemed alive. It shimmered under my gaze as I lay there, warm with a heat that betokened sensualism although there was hardly any apparent cause for such a feeling.

I whispered Saul's name without thinking. Then the thought of him was taken from my brain as if invisible fingers had plucked it away.

I remember rolling over and laughing to myself, behavior most extraordinary if not unseemly for a person of my steady inclinations. The pillow felt like silk against my face and my senses began to fade. The darkness crept over me like warm syrup, soothing my body and mind. I muttered senselessly to myself, feeling as if my muscles were sucked dry of all energy, heavy as rock and lethargic with a delicious exhaustion.

Then, when I had almost slipped away, I felt another presence in the room. To my incredulous realization, it was not only familiar to me but I had absolutely no fear of it. Only an inexplicable sense of languorous expectation.

Then she came to me; the girl in the portrait.

I stared at the blue haze about her for only a moment for this quickly faded and, in my arms, was a vibrantly warm body. I remember no one feature of her behavior for everything was lost in overall sensation, a sensation mixed of excitement and revulsion, a sense of hideous, yet overpowering rapacity. I hung suspended in a cloud of ambivalence, my soul and body corroded with unnatural desire. And in my mind and echoing on my tongue I spoke a name over and over again.

The name *Clarissa.*

How can I judge the number of sick, erotic moments I spent there with her? Sense of time completely vanished from the scheme of things. A thick giddiness enveloped me. I tried to fight it but it was no use. I was consumed as my brother Saul had been consumed by this foul presence from the grave of night.

Then, in some inconceivable fashion, we were no longer on the bed but downstairs, whirling about in the living room, dancing wildly and closely. There was no music, only that incessant, beating rhythm I had heard those nights before. Yet now it seemed like music to me as I spun about the floor holding in my arms the ghost of a dead woman, entranced by her stunning beauty yet, at the same time, repelled by my uncontrollable hunger for her.

Once I closed my eyes for a second and felt a terrible coldness crawling in my stomach. But when I opened them it was gone and I was happy once more. *Happy?* It seems hardly the word now. Say rather hypnotized, torpid, my brain a numbed vessel of flesh unable to remove me one iota from this clutching spell.

Dancing went on and on. The floor was filled with couples. I am sure of that and yet I recall no aspect of their dress or form. All I remember is their faces, white and glistening, their eyes dull and lifeless, their mouths hanging open like dark, bloodless wounds.

Around and around and then a man with a large tray standing in the hallway arch

and sudden immersion in the dark; empty and still.

VII

I AWOKE with a sense of complete exhaustion.

I was soaked with perspiration, dressed only in my bottom undergarment. My clothes lay scattered across the floor, apparently thrown about in a frenzy. The bedclothes also lay in disordered heaps on the floor. From all appearances, I had gone insane the night before.

The light from the window annoyed me for some reason and, quickly, I shut my eyes, reluctant to believe it was morning again. I turned over onto my stomach and put my head beneath the pillow. I could still remember the enticing odor of her hair. The memory of it made my body shudder with odious craving.

Then a warmth began to cover my back and I raised myself up with a muttering frown. The sunlight was streaming through the windows onto my back. With a restless movement I pushed myself up, threw my legs over the side of the bed and got up to draw the shades.

It was a little better without the glare. I threw myself on the bed again, closed my eyes tightly and crowded the pillow over my head. I felt the light.

It sounds incredible, I know, but I felt it as surely as do certain creeper plants that climb toward the light without ever seeing it. And, in feeling light, I yearned all the more for darkness. I felt like some nocturnal creature somehow forced into brightness, repelled and pained by it.

I sat on the bed and looked around, a sound of unremitting complaint in my throat. I bit my lips, clenched and unclenched my hands, wanting to strike out violently at something, at anything. I found myself standing over an unlit candle, blowing sharply on it. I knew, even then, the senselessness of the act and yet I did it nevertheless, trying, inanely, to make an invisible flame go out so that night could return through its dark roads. Bringing back Clarissa.

Clarissa.

A CLICKING sound filled my throat and my body positively writhed. Not in pain or pleasure but in a combination of the two. I put my brother's robe over my body and wandered out into the silent hallway. There were no physical wants, no hunger, thirst, or other needs. I was a detached body, a comatose slave to the tyranny which had shackled me and now refused to let me go.

I stood at the head of the stairway, listening intently, trying to imagine her gliding up to meet me, warm and vibrant in her mist of blue. *Clarissa.* I closed my eyes quickly, my teeth grated together and, for a split second, I felt my body stiffen with fright. For a moment I was returned to myself.

But then, in another breath, I was enslaved again. I stood there, feeling myself a part of the house, as much a portion of it as the beams or the windows. I breathed its breath, felt its soundless heartbeat in my own. I became at one with an inanimate body, knowing its past life, sensing the dead hands that had curled their fingers on the arms of the chairs, on bannisters, on doorknobs, hearing the labored tread of invisible footsteps moving through the house, the laughter of long-consumed humor.

If, in those moments, I lost my soul, it became a part of the emptiness and stillness that surrounded me, an emptiness I could not sense nor a stillness feel for being drugged. Drugged with the formless presence of the past. I was no longer a living person. I was dead in all but those bodily functions which kept me from complete satisfaction.

Quietly, and without passion, the thought of killing myself drifted through my mind. It was gone in a moment but its passage had stirred no more in me but apathetic recognition. My thoughts were on the life beyond life. And present existence was no more than a minor obstruction which I could tumble with the slightest touch of razored steel, the minutest drop of poison. I had become the master of life for I could view its destruction with the most complete apathy.

Night. Night! When would it come? I heard my voice, thin and hoarse, crying out in the silence,

"Why does the day have to last so long!"

The words shocked me back again, for Saul had spoken them. I blinked, looked around me as if just realizing where I was. What was this terrible power over me? I tried to break its hold but, in the very effort, slipped back again.

To find myself once more in that strange coma that suspends the very ill in that slender portion of existence between life and death. I was hanging on a thread over the pit of everything that was hidden to me before. Now I could see and hear and the power to cut the thread was in my hands. I could let myself hang until the strands parted one by one and lowered me slowly down. Or I could wait until driven beyond endurance, then end it suddenly, cut myself loose and plunge down into the darkness; that signal darkness where she and hers remained always. Then I would have her maddening warmth. Maybe it was her coldness. Her comfort then. I could pass eternal moments with her and laugh at the robot world.

I wondered if it would help to get dead drunk and lose all consciousness till night.

I descended the stairs on unfeeling legs and sat for a long time before the mantel looking up at her. I had no idea what time it was nor did I care. Time was relative, even forgotten. I neither knew of it nor cared about it. Had she smiled at me then? Yes, here eyes glowed, how they glowed in the dimness. That smell again. Not pleasant yet something excitingly musky and pungent about it.

What was Saul to me? The idea filled my mind. He was no relation of mine. He was a stranger from another society, another flesh, another life. I felt complete dispassion toward him. You hate him, said the voice in my mind.

That was when it all collapsed like a flimsy house of cards.

For those words caused such a rebellion in my innermost mind that, suddenly, my eyes were cleared as though scales had fallen from them. I looked about, my head snapping crazily. What in God's name was I doing, still here in the house?

With a shiver of angry fear I jumped to my feet and ran upstairs to dress. As I passed the hall clock I saw with a start that it was past three in the afternoon.

As I dressed, normal sensations returned one by one. I felt the cold floor beneath my bare feet, became aware of hunger and thirst, heard the deep silence of the house.

Everything flooded over me. I knew why Saul had wanted to die, why he loathed the day and waited for the night with such angry impatience. I could explain it to him now and he would understand because I had been through it myself.

And, as I ran down the stairs, I thought about the dead of Slaughter House, so outraged at their own inexplicable curse that they tried to drag the living down into their endless hell.

Over, over!—exulted my mind as I locked the front door behind me and started through the misty rain to the hospital.

I did not see the shadow behind me, crouching on the porch.

VIII

WHEN the woman at the hospital desk told me that Saul had been discharged two hours before my arrival, I was too stunned to speak. I clutched at the counter, staring at her, hearing myself tell her that she must be mistaken. My voice was hoarse, unnatural. The woman shook her head.

I sagged against the counter then, all the drive gone out of me. I felt very tired and afraid. A sob broke in my throat as I turned away and I saw people staring at me while I moved across the tile floor with unsteady motions. Everything seemed to swirl about me. I staggered, almost fell. Someone clutched my arm and asked me if I were all right. I muttered something in reply and pulled away from the person without even noting if it were a man or a woman.

I pushed out through the door and into the gray light. It was raining harder and I pulled up my coat collar. Where was he? The question burned in my mind and the answer to it came quickly, too quickly. Saul was back in the house. I felt sure of it.

The idea made me start running up the dark street toward the trolley car tracks. I ran for endless blocks. All I remember is the rain driving against my face and the

gray buildings floating by. There were no people in the streets and all the taxicabs were full. It was getting darker and darker.

My legs almost buckled and I was thrown against a lamp post and clung to it, afraid of falling into the streaming gutter.

An ugly clanging filled my ears. I looked up, then chased after the trolley car and caught it at the next block. I handed the conductor a dollar and had to be called back for my change. I stood hanging from a black strap, swaying back and forth with the motion of the car, my mind tormented by thoughts of Saul alone in that house of horror.

The warm, stale air of the car began to make me sick to the stomach. I could smell the raincoats and the wet clothes of the people caught in the rain as well as the smell of dripping umbrellas and packages soaked. I closed my eyes and stood there, teeth clenched, praying that I would get home before it was too late.

I got off the car at last and ran up the block as fast as I could. The rain sprayed over my face and ran into my eyes, almost blinding me. I slipped and went sprawling on the sidewalk, skinning my hands and knees. I pushed up with a whine, feeling the clothes soaked against me. I kept running wildly, only sensing the direction by instinct until I stopped and saw through the thick veil of rain, the house in front of me, high and dark.

It seemed to crawl over the ground toward me and clutch me to itself for I found myself standing and shivering on the wooden porch. I coughed and felt the chill through my flesh.

I tried the door. At first I could not believe it. It was still locked and Saul had no key! I almost cried in gratitude. I ran down from the porch. Where was he then? I had to find him. I started down the path.

Then, as surely as if I had been tapped on the shoulder I whirled about and stared up at the porch. A flash of lightning illuminated the darkness and I saw the broken, jagged-edged window. My breath caught and I stared at it, my heart pounding like a heavy piston in my chest.

He *was* in there. Had she come already? Was he lying upstairs in bed smiling to himself in the blackness, waiting for her luminous self to come and envelop him?

I had to save him. Without hesitation I ran up on the porch and unlocked the door, leaving it wide open so that we could escape.

I moved across the rug and onto the steps. The house was quiet. Even the storm seemed apart from it. The rushing sound of the rain seemed to grow less and less distinct. Then I turned with a gasp as the front door slammed shut behind me.

I was trapped. The thought drove barbs of fear into me and I almost ran down to try and escape. But I remembered Saul and fought to quicken resolution. I had conquered the house once and I could do it again. I had to. For him.

I started up the stairs again. Outside the flashes of lightning were like false neon trying to invade the austerity of the house. I held onto the bannister tightly, muttering beneath my breath to keep attention from degrading into fright, afraid to let the spell of the house beset me again.

I reached the door to my brother's room. There I stopped and leaned against the wall, eyes closed. What if I found him dead? I knew the sight would unnerve me. The house might defeat me then, taking me in that moment of utter despair and twisting my soul from my grip.

I would not let myself conceive of it. I would not allow myself the realization that without Saul life was empty, a meaningless travesty. He *was* alive.

Nervously, my hands numbed with fright, I pushed open the door. The room was a stygian cave. My throat contracted and I took a deep breath. I clenched tight fists at my sides.

"Saul?" I called his name softly.

The thunder roared and my voice disappeared beneath the swell. A flash of lightning brought a split second of daylight into the room and I looked around quickly, hoping to see him. Then it was dark again and silent except for the endless rain falling on the windows and roof. I took another step across the rug, cautiously, my ears tense, trying to hear. Every sound made me start. I twitched and shuffled across the floor. Was he here? But he must be. If he were here in

the house, this was the room he would be in.

"Saul?" I called, louder. "Saul, answer me."

I began to walk toward the bed.

Then the door slammed behind me and there was a rushing sound behind me in the darkness. I whirled to meet it. I felt his hand clamp on my arm.

"Saul!" I cried.

Lightning filled the room with hideous light and I saw his twisted white face, the candlestick held in his right hand.

Then he struck me a violent blow on the forehead, driving a wedge of agonizing pain into my brain. I felt his hand release me as I slumped to my knees and my face brushed against his bare leg as I fell forward. The last sound I heard before my mind fell into the darkness was laughing and laughing and laughing.

IX

I OPENED my eyes. I was still lying on the rug. Outside it was raining even harder. The sound of it was like the crashing thunder of a waterfall. Thunder still rolled in the sky and flashes of lightning made the night brilliant.

In one flash I looked at the bed. The sight of the covers and sheets all thrown about insanely made me push up. Saul was downstairs with *her!*

I tried to get to my feet but the pain in my head drove me back to my knees. I shook my head feebly, running trembling hands over my cheeks, feeling the gouged wound in my forehead, the dried blood which had trickled down across one temple. I swayed back and forth on my knees, moaning. I seemed to be back in that void again, struggling to regain my hold on life. The power of the house surrounded me. The power which I knew was her power. A cruel and malignant vitality which tried to drink out the life force from me and draw me down into the pit.

Then, once more, I remembered Saul, my brother, and the remembrance brought me back the strength I needed.

"No!" I cried out as if the house had told me I was now its helpless captive. And I pushed to my feet, ignoring the dizziness, stumbling through a cloud of pain across the room, gasping for breath. The house was throbbing and humming, filled with that obnoxious smell.

I ran drunkenly for the door, found myself running into the bed. I drew back with almost a snarl at the numbing pain in my shins. I turned in the direction of the door and ran again. I did not even hold my arms ahead of me and had no chance to brace myself when I ran into the door dizzily.

The excruciating pain of my nose being near broken caused a howl of agony to pass my lips. Blood immediately began gushing down across my mouth and I had to keep wiping it away. I jerked open the door and ran into the hall, feeling myself on the border of insanity. The hot blood kept running down across my chin and I felt it dripping and soaking into my coat. My hat had fallen off but I still wore my raincoat over my suit.

I was too bereft of perception to notice that nothing held me back at the head of the stairs. I half ran, half slid down the stairs, goaded on by that humming, formless laughter which was music and mockery. The pain in my head was terrible. Every downward step made it feel as if someone drove one more nail into my brain.

"Saul, Saul!" I cried out, running into the living room, gagging as I tried to call his name a third time.

The living room was dark, permeated with that sickly odor. It made my head reel but I kept moving. It seemed to thicken as I moved for the kitchen. I ran into the small room and leaned against the wall, almost unable to breathe, pinpoints of light spinning before my eyes.

Then, as lightning illumined the room I saw the left cupboard door wide open and, inside, a large bowl filled with what looked like flour. As I stared at it, tears rolled down my cheeks and my tongue felt like dry cloth in my mouth.

I backed out of the kitchen choking for breath, feeling as if my strength were almost gone. I turned and ran into the living room, still looking for my brother.

Then, in another flash of lightning, I looked at her portrait. It was different and

the difference froze me to the spot. Her face was no longer beautiful. Whether it was shadow that did it or actual change, her expression was one of vicious cruelty. The eyes glittered, there was an insane cast to her smile. Even her hands, once folded in repose, now seemed more like claws waiting to strike out and kill.

It was when I backed away from her that I stumbled and fell over the body of my brother.

I pushed up to my knees and stared down in the blackness. One flash of lightning after another showed me his white, dead face, the smile of hideous knowledge on his lips, the look of insane joy in his wide-open eyes. My mouth fell open and breath caught in me. It seemed as if my world were ending. I could not believe it was true. I clutched at my hair and whimpered, almost believing that in a moment, mother would wake me from my nightmare and I would look across at Saul's bed, smile at his innocent sleep and lie down again secure with the memory of his dark hair on the white pillow.

But it did not end. The rain slapped frenziedly at the windows and thunder drove deafening fists against the earth.

I looked up at the portrait. I felt as dead as my brother. I did not hesitate. Calmly I stood and walked to the mantel. There were matches there. I picked up the box.

Instantly, she divined my thoughts for the box was torn from my fingers and hurled against the wall. I dove for it and was tripped by some invisible force. Those cold hands clutched at my throat. I felt no fright but tore them away with a snarl and dove for the matches again. Blood began running faster and I spat out some.

I picked up the box. It was torn away again, this time to burst and spray matches all over the rug. A great hum of anguish seemed to rock the house as I reached for a match. I was grabbed. I tore loose. I fell to my knees and slapped at the rug in the darkness as lightning ceased. My arms were held tightly. Something cold and wet ran around in my stomach.

With maniacal fury I pressed my teeth against a match I saw in the lightning and

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bit at the head. There was no rewarding flare. The house was trembling violently now and I heard rustlings about me as if she had called them all to fight me, to save their cursed existence.

I bit at another match. A white face stared at me from the rug and I spit blood at it. It disappeared. I tore one arm loose and grabbed a match. I jerked myself to the mantel and dragged the match across the rough wood. A speck of flame flared up in my fingers and I was released.

The throbbing seemed more violent now. But I knew it was helpless against flame. I protected the flame with my hand though, lest that cold wind come again and try to blow it out. I held the match against a magazine that was lying on a chair and it flared up. I shook it and the pages puffed into flame. I threw it down on the rug.

I went around in that light striking one match after another, avoiding the sight of Saul lying there. She had destroyed him but now I would destroy her forever.

I ignited the curtains. I started the rug to smoldering. I set fire to the furniture. The house rocked and a whistling sigh rose and ebbed like the wind.

At last I stood erect in the flaming room, my eyes riveted on the portrait. I walked slowly toward it. She knew my intentions for the house rocked even harder and a shrieking began that seemed to come from the walls. And I knew then that the house was controlled by her and that her power was in that portrait.

I drew it down from the wall. It shook in my very hands as if it were alive. With a shudder of repugnance I threw it on the flames.

I almost fell while the floor shuddered almost as if earthquake were striking the land. But then it stopped and the portrait was burning and the last effect of her was gone. I was alone in an old burning house.

I did not want anyone to know about my brother. I did not want anyone to see his face like that.

So I lifted him and put him on the couch. I do not understand to this day how I could lift him up when I felt so weak. It was a strength not my own.

I sat at his feet, stroking his hand until the flames grew too hot. Then I rose. I bent over him and kissed him on the mouth for a last goodbye. And I walked from the house into the rain. And I never came back. Because there was nothing to ever come back for.

* * * *

This is the end of the manuscript. There seems no adequate evidence to ascribe the events recounted as true. But the following facts, taken from the city's police files might prove of interest.

In 1901, the city was severely shocked by the most wholesale murder ever perpetrated in its history.

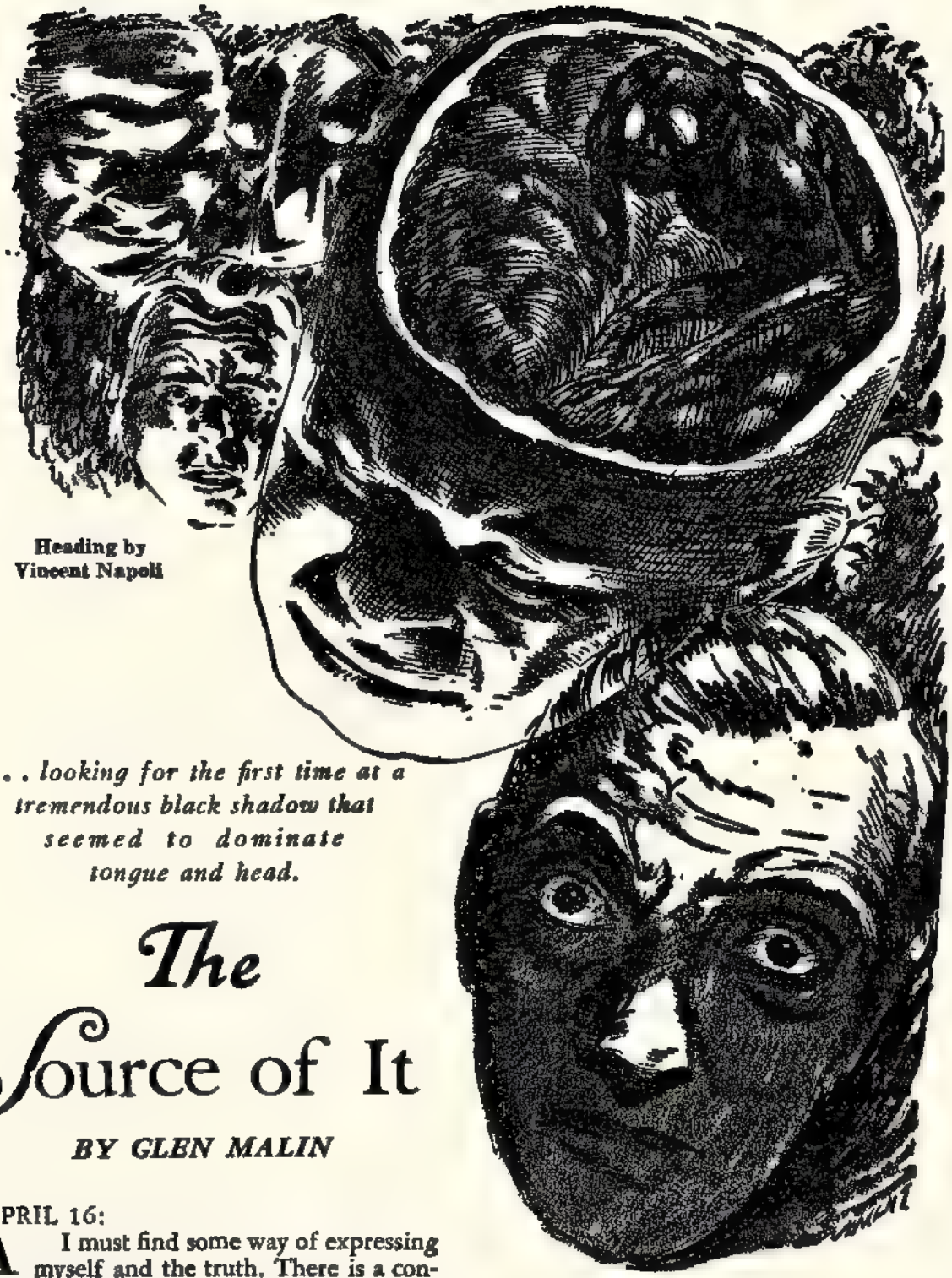
At the height of a party being held at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Marlin Slaughter and their daughter Clarissa, an unknown person poisoned the punch by placing a very large amount of arsenic in it. Everyone died. The case was never solved although various theories were put forth as to its solution. One thesis had it that the murderer was one of those who died.

As to the identity of this murderer, supposition had it that it was not a murderer but a murderess. Although nothing definite exists to go by, there are several testimonies which refer to "that poor child Clarissa" and indicate that the young woman had been suffering for some years from a severe mental aberration which her parents had tried to keep a secret from the neighbors and the authorities. The party in mention was supposed to have been planned to celebrate what her parents took for the recovery of her faculties.

As to the body of the young man later supposed to be in the wreckage, a thorough search has revealed nothing. It may be that the entire story is imagination, fabricated by the one brother in order to conceal the death of the other, said death probably being unnatural. Thus, the older brother knowing the story of the house tragedy may have used it for a fantastic evidence in his favor.

Whatever the truth, the older brother has never been heard of again either in this city or in any of the adjacent localities.

And that's the story. S. D. M.



Heading by
Vincent Napoli

. . . looking for the first time at a tremendous black shadow that seemed to dominate tongue and head.

The Source of It

BY GLEN MALIN

APRIL 16:

I must find some way of expressing myself and the truth. There is a conspiracy against me that is threatening my absolute ruin and has left me utterly confused. This confusion, however, does not apply to those forces against me, for I know who they are. Mr. George, my competitor in the grocery business, is one of them. As I gave him the keys to my store he tried to look grave but inside of him there was a laughter; a laughter directed against me. In his eyes was a triumph and even in his fanged smile I could detect a terrible appetite finally appeased. He had fought me,

won, and all he said was, "Rotten luck, Sam." No, I know who my enemies are, that is not what confuses me. Sometimes my wife is one of them as her eyes quietly question and oppose me. There are things she will not say but I know at last that she is really against me. Perhaps I am overly sensitive but there are times when I see the hostile faces in a crowd I feel the old bewilderment. Why are they all against me? All my life I have kept my business practices clean, my marriage pure. The only honest conclusion I can arrive at is that they are trying to make me in their own image: corrupt and evil. Yes, evil, that must be it. They are evil, I am good and evil has triumphed. My business is gone, my wife is beginning to stare endlessly at me at supper time. How contemptuous she is! But I shall preserve my soul against them all-with the help of God we may eventually win. If only I knew the source of evil on earth, which has malignantly spread to nearly all the people and is fishing for me at this very moment. If only I could be shown the way out of this dark pit. I stand ready to fight but I have no equipment and I do not know how to get it. I must have some way of expressing myself.

April 17:

A miracle! It must have been a miracle! All last night I prayed for it and now it is mine. I must be cautious, though, or others will detect my new powers. Today I walked all over town: in the offices, stores, bars and on street corners; anywhere people will gather. I was going slowly, taking it easy; allowing my new talents to assert themselves. And I looked into hundreds of faces. Immediately I found the evil. The confusion is gone. God has allowed me to look beyond the flesh and bone into the recesses of the brain. There I saw in every head a dark shadow that slithered about the brain. And when they talked the shadow hovered about the tongue and lies came out. "Oh, I can't go out with you tonight, George. I have some extra work at the office." And George said, "Well, all right, Doris; I'll bet you work pretty hard." Lies! All lies! But I can fight it now and I need not fear my enemies. I did make somewhat of an error, though. In my enthusiasm I told my wife everything (except the fact that I have super X-ray eyes). She looked incredulous for a moment then her face softened into almost a kindliness, reminiscent of the Kate I once knew. "Sam, this has been a strain on you, dear. You'd better get some rest." She walked over to where I was sitting, expecting me to kiss her. I saw the shadow gliding around her head; that slippery black evanscence. "Aren't you going to kiss me goodnight," she said.

"Lies, lies," I said. But I couldn't expect her to understand; my powers were too much for anyone to grasp. She stared at me in the same way as before except that she bit her lower lip. "Sam, I don't know about you. You'd better get some rest." Kate isn't really so bad; her shadow is not as large and ugly as some I have seen. But it is there, small or large: the enemy.

I brushed her aside and went into the next room. At supper she did not speak a single word but I was quick to notice the cunning glances she stole at me; all the contempt was back. I do not think she believes my powers which is so much the better for me. But I must be more careful in the future.

April 20:

I am getting closer to it. I now believe the source of it is in this city. Thus far I have not found anyone whom I can work with, whose brain and soul is uncontaminated—except my own. Today I thought I had found the source of it. He had the largest shadow of anyone I have yet encountered. As I wanted to study the thing, I opened the conversation seeking to detain him. He was outwardly genial, but from my observations the really evil ones are always engaging personalities. "This one is on me," I told him.

"Well, sir, I thank you," he said. But his smile didn't fool me now; the shadow was in full possession of that utterance. As he sipped I noticed he eyed me almost casually with the hard glint of his pupils, trying to figure me out. I knew he was afraid of me. "Got to run now—appointment, you know," he said, not even daring to face me. He pushed back his stool and left hurriedly.

"Lies, lies," I muttered, but he had left. His fear of me was genuine, though, which is why I do not think he is the real source. But he is close to it. The real source would not be afraid. Somehow I have never formulated a plan for dealing with the real source.

April 22:

Events are shaping quickly. From exhaustive studies of various areas in our town I can now reveal that It is in my immediate neighborhood. All last night I prayed for guidance as Kate snored stupidly in the next room. She would never understand, poor shadow-ridden soul that she is. But it is in my power to help her as it is to help Mr. George and all mankind. Poor Kate! Now she misunderstands my gift of vision! Today she called in a doctor. They were waiting for me as I came in; leering at me quietly. This doctor is a cool one with his brain half consumed with the shadow. He gave me a physical, pronouncing me unusually fit. "I don't understand," he kept shaking his head. But I knew he did and his subsequent questioning showed he understood—partially at least. "When did you first take up this-er-street walking?"

I was quick to see the trap. "Oh, about a week ago, I guess," I smiled straight at him.

"Why do you do this, Sam? May I call you Sam?"

Oh, he was an oily ingratiating one! "Of course," I said. "I walk the streets for my health," I lied—in a good cause, of course.

"But your wife said—" he caught himself.

"My wife, sir, says a lot of things."

The doctor then gave a shrug and moved out into our gallery. My wife had already excused herself, saying, "I want to get some air." But I knew she lied, that she really wanted to have a chat with the doctor—secretly. Oh, I know they are hatching some plot against me, but it doesn't matter. I have God on my side and with just a few more days I shall have the Source of It. Just a few more days.

April 26:

These have been trying days! My wife has nearly undone me! Oh, I suppose I underestimated her, but I didn't think she would move so quickly. I was right about that plot on our gallery, but how could they have gotten me committed so quickly. Well, there is no use complaining now; all my previous work is undone. But there is one thing I can still do—observe. At least, too, I am near home. This is comforting.

My observations have not been so objective due, undoubtedly, to my overwrought condition. But in time my vision will clarify itself again. However, Roseridge is such a small place with so few faces to analyze that I fear that I shall never even get near the source. Also it is difficult to pray in this dormitory with all these pitifully deranged people about me. The nurses and doctors don't mind my praying or my walking about the dormitory on observations. No, they "don't mind me." I think the proper word is "humoring." Ah, if only they knew my plan!

All the people I have observed (albeit cursorily) thus far are contaminated, especially the doctors with their stupid questioning. I can also reveal that I "interest" them.

April 27:

Well, this has been a day, I can tell you! First I met Tweed and secondly I learned that I could go before the appeal board tomorrow. I had just concluded my morning prayers and was about to leave my bed area on my morning rounds when this fellow Tweed came down the aisle. Everyone had told me he was the incorrigible one: a hopeless, but cheerful idiot who was committed when he was nine or ten. His lips were constantly trembling; there was a bit of foaming saliva trickling down his agaping jaw. I looked in a terrible fascination at him for the first time as you might look at a Bushman who would almost, but not quite past muster as human. Tweed turned in the direction of my bed and stared right through me. It seemed to me that his eyes were all black pupil. He turned to leave for the grounds (for he had complete access to Roseridge, as I had) when I spoke. "You-you are Tweed?"

I did not expect from what the others had told me that he was capable of coherent speech. But he answered in perfect diction.

"I am Tweed." Just like that; unfettered with qualifiers or modifiers.

"Why is it I have not seen you before?" I asked.

"They have kept me at work," he said very slowly.

It was then that I detected what Tweed really was. He was good; he was free of the shadows; his tongue unatrophied by lies. In short, Tweed was on my side, struggling against this black pit; a shining survivor in a sea of corruption. What he meant by "they" was quite obvious.

We talked most of the morning quietly, about simple matters. But it was all truth. I must admit that Tweed is sorely limited intellectually, yet it is his very simplicity that accounts for his spotless soul. It is funny that I am the only one of exceptional capacities (of all I have observed, anyway) whose mind is clean. I, of all the people, have been chosen; have been made to suffer so that I may understand His message. And now I have a humble agent, this Tweed, whom I stumbled on by accident. Accident? Perhaps not; perhaps I was made to suffer here at Roseridge by a plan. I cannot rightly say. But surely Tweed must figure in a grand alliance against It. Perhaps, too, I have been led even closer to the Source; perhaps It is here. Anyway, we shall see. Tomorrow I go before the board for an appeal. We shall see.

April 28:

I have not seen Tweed today. "They" have kept him at work. There is something I omitted yesterday that has just occurred to me. While Tweed and I were talking I noticed out of the corner of my eye that the nurse was looking at us uneasily. Then she ducked out of the dormitory. It is odd that I forgot this incident (I was too enraptured, no doubt, with the alliance). But I am sure now that they are trying to keep us apart although I'm sure they don't understand my designs.

I saw the board of appeals today. Frankly, I was disappointed with the whole affair. It was so heavily dominated by routine that I could not detect any new manifestations of evil. Except for the puzzled glances the head of Roseridge gave me, there is nothing much to report. He is a commanding figure, this Mr. Samson (I believe that is the head's name); very tall and thin and a most remarkable huge shadow in his head. I don't suppose I shall ever see him again (he makes the rounds of Roseridge about twice a year, they tell me). Too bad; I should like to observe him more closely.

Well, the board refused my appeal as I expected, and I am right back where I started from.

I wish I could contact Tweed.

May 1:

Just as I was about to despair of any action, all the while sinking into the dreadful regimen of this place, a sudden development has taken place that has altered my whole situation. Mr. Samson has decided to stay on awhile at Roseridge because (as the grapevine has it) I have "interested" him. Well, he has interested me, too, and after what happened to me today I might say Mr. Samson has positively fascinated me. I was called into his office after my morning prayers (they are considerate that way). His huge rickety frame even got up from the swivel chair when I came in. I sat opposite him looking really for the first time at that tremendous black creature in his head that seemed to dominate the brain, the tongue—the very essence of the man.

"Mr. Samuel Stone, isn't it?" his raised eyebrows almost comically appraising me.

"Yes," I said, not being able to take my eyes off him—even if I had wanted to.

"You have a most-interesting-record here." Mr. Samson took out some forms, shuffled them a bit and picked out perhaps a half dozen sheets.

"Wife committed you, eh? Hell of a thing to have happen."

"Yes, sir." My respect for him was mounting, not in what he said but in the fearless, playful way he said things.

"Let's see. You walk the streets examining people's faces. A most interesting avocation, I'd say. Like to do that myself."

I waited almost impatiently for his next words as he began shuffling the sheets absently. Somehow I was being overpowered, I could not speak. He was calling the turn, and I waited.

"You lost your business, I see. Too much avocation?" he was taunting me now.

THERE was something here I couldn't quite grasp. It wasn't really Samson I was concerned about but that damned shadow. It was as though the shadow was completely and irrecoverably in charge. I had not noted such dominance before.

"Don't wish to talk about that, eh? Well, a man's own affair, I suppose." He put the papers on the desk and pulled out some cards. "Now. We have to give you a complete check up, you know, to ascertain if there is anything organically-ah-unsound."

Samson was lying; there, at least, I caught him. He wanted to find out my secret. It was a long and a rather thorough examination. As usual, I was judged physically fit.

"About your eyes, though, Mr. Stone."

I took in a deep breath.

"They are quite extraordinary, you know. Most perceptive organs, indeed."

That was all he said about that, although, you could tell he was asking me to supply him with the rest of it. But I was not that much fascinated by him. Before I left, however, Samson gave it one more try. "I'll see you tomorrow at this same time, Mr. Stone," his fingers drummed the desk as though he were trying to remember something else to say. But I caught on to that trick of his: disarming you with apparently casual remarks. I waited for it.

"Ah, by the way, Mr. Stone. What do you see in those faces?

I remained silent.

"Don't want to tell?" the taunting came back into his voice.

As I look on that interview in a cooler perspective I can deduce now what it had really meant. Obviously, the chips are down; the lines are drawn. He will interview with a pretense of gaining "helpful" knowledge about me, when actually he wants to wrench my secret from me. I must not be rash or seize upon false premises but I can safely say that Mr. Samson is at least very close to the Source of It.

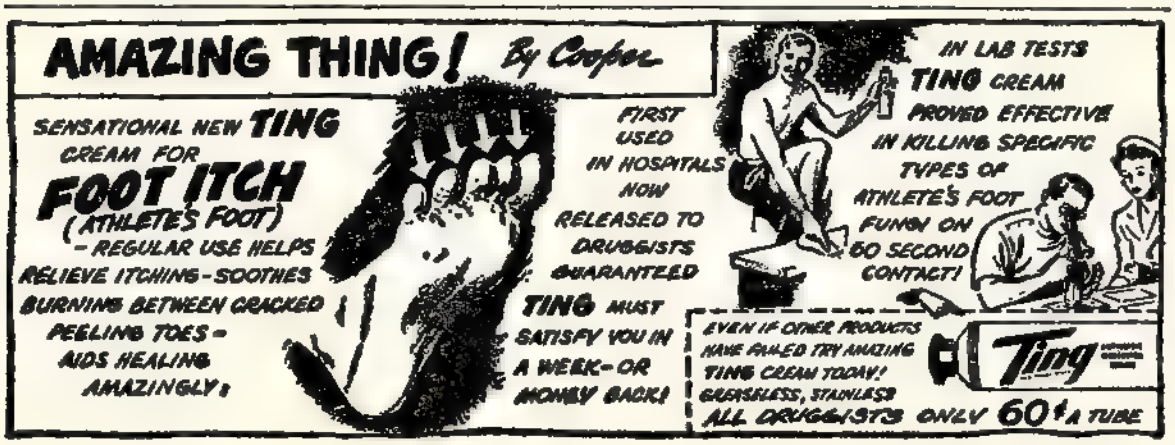
May 3:

Today I saw Tweed; this time in the secluded garden surounding the dormitory where we could talk unobtrusively. He was, as usual, quite frank and open about everything I asked him. Tweed told me that he was on a kind of work holiday this week, that he liked to walk about the grounds. My first problem with him was to make him like me in his simple way, then to make him believe everything I said, which would be ultimately for his own good, anyway. The former problem, it seems, is already solved. "You are the only one who lets me talk," he said at one point in our conversation today. And when he said it he smiled (they had told me he rarely smiled). Since he speaks only the truth, I believe him. Thus the latter problem, getting him to believe as I did. I began by merely mentioning Mr. Samson. He trembled even at the sound of his name.

"Why do you fear Mr. Samson?" I asked. Before he could answer, I put in, "It's because you hate him, isn't it?"

"I—I don't know. B—but everytime I enter his room—"

"His room!"



"Y—yes. I clean his room."

"Excellent!" I cried.

"He yells at me. Calls me stupid. I—I don't like that. And sometimes he threatens me."

I paused, trying to broach it to him on his level.

"Do you know why he does that," I began, watching his jaw fall agape. "Because he hates you. You are good and he is bad and that is why he hates you."

Again Tweed smiled, "Y—yes! That's it all right." I had simplified it but it was all true nonetheless.

"You see, Tweed, he is your enemy. Never forget that. Never!" And that sunk in, too. Thus I had formed the grand alliance of purity. You could tell he was thinking about it as hard as his capacities would allow. I left him with that puzzled look on his face. I could use him, all right. And when he had accepted the fact that he hated Samson there would be other things to tell him. What a stroke of luck: Tweed's being orderly of Samson's room! Now we can gather the information we need to fight him.

May 4:

The interviews with Samson have just about come to a head. He now is more direct, more insistent. Also, I believe, he is a little more afraid of me. I can say that I am now no longer overwhelmed by him anymore, thanks to my gift of greater vision.

He asked me again today why I looked at the faces. Of course, he got no answer as I maintained silence, continuing to stare at that all-consuming shadow of his. Perhaps, I made it a little too obvious because he caught on to my designs—partially, at least.

"Stone! Are you studying me?" When I didn't answer he colored slightly. "By God, you are! So I'm just like all the others—those on the street!"

"No, not at all," I blundered.

He started to laugh," But you *are* studying me. I interest you, too, eh?"

"Yes." It would do no harm to admit it.

"Well, I want you to know that these grillings will continue until you cooperate."

Samson reached into his drawer, selecting a long streamlined cigar. He paced himself beautifully while I waited: over two minutes to light and take the first puff from his cigar.

"You know, Stone, I could let you out in a minute," he flicked at the cigar," if you would only cooperate."

"Yes, sir."

"Otherwise I have the power to keep you here—indefinitely."

I stood up from the swivel chair. Before he ended the interview I took another look at the shadow and I knew for certain.

"You think about that and then you can give me your-ah-decision tomorrow."

There is no doubt about it; his huge shadow, his clever trap to make me divulge the secret; his threats: he is the Source.

May 5:

Well, now I have done it! And a pretty mess, I must say! Samson trapped me into it, how I cannot recollect. Oh, he is clever! He began, as nearly as I can tell, by taunting me about my wife.

"So you let her put one over on you, eh, Stone? And while you looked at people's faces she got the doctors and the lawyers and had you committed. What a fine excuse you gave her to get rid of you: looking at people's faces! Dare say I blame her. Not very smart are you—*Mr.* Stone?

Well, I hadn't been feeling too good that day, anyway, and that speech started me off.

"You are evil, Samson! Evil! Hear me!"

"Enough! Go to your bed!" But he wasn't really angry; rather, very pleased with himself as he extended that gaunt jaw into the air, blowing smoke. "See you tomorrow, Stone. That should conclude our business."

When I got back from supper tonight, feeling as miserable as when Mr. George had put one over on me, who should be sitting on my bed but Tweed. Instantly the whole scheme was formulated in my mind. I could not take another interview with Samson, that was sure. And there was Tweed, with proper probing, who would see to it that I would never have another "chat" with Samson.

It took about a half an hour to convince Tweed. Since it was the truth and he was one of the few in this world pure enough to understand it, Tweed was only too happy

to help in our cause. When he left that night I felt an overweening desire to shout. My mission, at last, was consummated

May 6:

When the news had finally gotten around the dormitory that Samson had been stabbed, I was amazed at the outbursts of indignation and the derogations against Tweed. They tell me that he is in solitary confinement and that he will be sent to another hospital. It is, however, a small loss in return for what he has given the world. The everlasting end of all evil. The Source of It is destroyed! And these fools rage against the emancipator! But I must have patience. What I have done cannot easily be appreciated. It is too immense a deed for those without the gift. Soon they will understand. As the shadows of iniquity recede from their brains, free of the evil sustenance of the Source—then will they hear the words of purity and goodness. Already I have made observations around the dormitory. While it is too early to judge, I expect a gradual receding of the shadows.

This is truly a day for rejoicing!

May 7:

I have conducted further observations around the dormitory today. It is so discouraging but I am much too impatient, I'm afraid. I have not noted any signs of the loosening grip of the shadow. But, as I say, I am just overanxious. I know sincerely that this cannot have been done in vain.

Tomorrow (so the grapevine says) the detectives are coming.

May 8:

Today we were questioned by the detectives—and a stupid lot they are. They have not come to me yet so I cannot evaluate them scientifically. Tomorrow they will get to me for certain. I am not the least bit concerned. What I am concerned about, though, is that the shadows have not at all lost their grips on the people I have observed. On the contrary, in some cases it has even increased its dominance. What can be the matter? I must be more methodical tomorrow. Perhaps my measurements have not been dispassionate enough.

May 9:

Something has come up that has made me quit my dormitory observations. It is not pleasant but I must face up to it. Today I was questioned by the chief detective, a Mr. Henry. I had forgotten to mention yesterday (I was so engrossed in the dormitory observations) that he was a very bright fellow with a large shadow on his brain. Well, judging by today, that's only the half of it. Oh, he wasn't bright enough to get any evidence on me, but I was with him long enough to observe carefully the shadow. The most tremendous shadow I have ever seen. Even larger than Mr. Samson's. That is why this whole business is so distasteful. It proves why the tentacles of evil have not receded. I have not got to the real Source. But from my observations (and they were scrupulously objective, I can tell you) Mr. Henry is the real Source. It is such a pity to lose poor Tweed in an abortive cause but, as I said before, one must face up to it, take the bull by the horns as it were. It is surely fortuitous, too, that Mr. Henry wants to see me tomorrow at his office. That will give me the chance I need to destroy him. Of course, I shall be apprehended but that does not matter, considering the great service I will have rendered the world. I shall receive my just rewards in eternity from far wiser councils. It is in this that I rejoice and in the anticipation of my act tomorrow.

I have but few regrets. Tweed is one of them (although his act was valiant); Mr. Samson was another. Considering, however, the enormity of his evil I may safely list him as expendable.

So tomorrow it will all be over.

There is another thing I wish to express. I suppose I can allow myself a foolish whimsy. There was an assistant detective to Mr. Henry whose shadow is nearly as large as Mr. Henry's. Yes, I should like to observe the assistant detective before I destroy the Source. This leads me to a final comment that future historians may glean from my vast experience in this matter: evil is rather a complex phenomenon.

It was a dream house; yet the dream could have been a nightmare. . . .

The Missing Room

by

Lyn Venable

FROM the low cruising helicar, the cottage appeared charming. Lorinda gave a little exclamation of delight and exclaimed breathlessly, "Oh, that one, Dyke. Please, we must look at that one."

The helicar was only about a hundred feet from the ground, and they could easily see the "For Sale" sign on the green lawn. Dyke guided the helicar down onto the landing strip beside the attached copterport. The cottage certainly had the most modern conveniences.

They stepped out, Dyke assisting Lorinda from the helicar with all the self-conscious solicitude of a brand new husband. They stood for a moment on the neat little postage stamp of a lawn, arm in arm.

The cottage was different from the others on the block, it was similar in its contemporary design, its just-for-two smallness, but still, it *was* different. It seemed to radiate charm out of all proportion to its physical aspects, as sometimes a relatively unattractive person will, for no reason you can put your finger on, be utterly irresistible.

"I wonder if it's open?" asked Lorinda.

"There's one way to find out," answered Dyke. After a token rap on the door, he

Heading by A. V. DiGiannurio

twisted the knob. The door opened quietly inward.

"Oh, Dyke, should we?"

The young man made a deprecatory gesture. "It says 'for sale' doesn't it? It was probably left open especially for the purpose of prospective buyers going through. Now, do you want to go in or not?"

Lorinda was torn between her tremendous attraction to the house and an innate desire to do things exactly as they should be done. "Oh, I—I do want to go in, but there's no one here. Don't you think we should go and make an appointment with the agent first?"

Dyke sighed with impatience, "Look, it's almost dark now, too late to fly all the way back to town and back again with the agent. This is the second afternoon this week I've had to leave work early to go house hunting with you. Travis gave me a dirty look when I left today, and I can't get off again. Now, let's go through this place and then if we like it we can call the agency in the morning and get the details. Okay?"

With a little frown between her eyes, Lorinda followed Dyke into the house.

There was a hidden closet, indistinguishable from the pretty pastel wall. Freev was behind its locked door. He had been sending a message to his superior in The Big Ship that hurtled unseen in her slow orbit around Earth. "Freev regrets that no specimens have been taken as yet. There were two groups today, both unsuitable. The first was a mated couple but too old for bearing young. The second was a pair of females, the second being the young of the first. I turned on the Repulsor Beam for both groups. They never stepped over the threshold but left immediately with negative Mind-plants. They will not choose to return. It is approaching dusk, I fear that my hunt has been a failure. I may as well cut off the Attractor Beam and prepare for . . . wait! Specimens have just come in, two of them! I think . . . yes, a young, mated pair! I must break connection now, this demands all my attention."

LORINDA brought her hands together in a gesture of utter fascination. Her eyes wandered from the little open fireplace to the wide-set casement windows, "Ohh . . . lovely, Dyke, lovely. Let's see the rest of it."

The kitchen was a dream. Row on row of glistening white metal cabinets lined the walls. Everything was the answer to a housewife's dream. Lorinda suddenly realized that Dyke was not beside her. "Dyke, where are you?" she called.

His voice came from another room. "I was just looking for the . . ."

"Well come here," she interrupted, "I want you to see the kitchen. What did you say you were looking for?"

"The bathroom. I can't seem to find it. I—I don't think there *is* one!"

"Silly! There must be one. If this is one of your jokes . . ."

Lorinda followed Dyke's voice, opening doors as she went. Closet . . . bedroom . . . closet . . . closet . . . bedroom.

She didn't see the closet without a doorknob, the one that was indistinguishable from the pretty pastel wall, the one with Freev in it.

Finally, after they had tried all the doors, they stood looking at each other in a kind of amused perplexity. Lorinda burst out laughing. "How could they, Dyke, oh how could they forget the . . . and it's such a darling house?"

Dyke grinned, a little embarrassed. "Oh, you know how they slap these houses together nowadays, mass production and all that . . . well, we might as well leave."

Lorinda pouted, "But Dyke, it was such a treasure of a house."

Freev realized that there had been a change in the attitude of his specimens. He felt their desire for the house wane, even though he turned up the Attractor Beam to its highest potential. Something was wrong. They were preparing to leave. No time now to contemplate on what he had done wrong, what detail he had overlooked. Something was wrong with the house and the specimens were leaving. He hadn't wanted to frighten them but emergency action was the only alternative now. The specimens had to be taken today if at all. The Big Ship had almost exhausted its fuel reserve fruitlessly circling Earth. It was

now or never. Freev pressed the necessary studs.

There was the sound of things closing. Doors slamming, windows shutting down tight.

"Dyke!" squealed Lorinda. Dyke ran for the front door as it slammed in his face. He pushed at it, fumbling with the latch. Nothing happened. He ran through the house to the rear door. Locked tight. The same with the windows. Then Lorinda screamed. The house was vibrating, the floor beneath them pulsating rhythmically. The vibrations grew stronger . . . and louder . . . and STRONGER . . . and L O U D E R!

"What is it, Dyke?" shrieked Lorinda. "What's happening?"

Freev was sending again, "Preparing for blast-off with two specimens. No time to dismantle exterior of house . . . will have to blast through . . . may be disabled on arrival . . . prepare for crash landing."

Dyke hammered at the glass of the windows. They refused to break. They weren't glass. The vibrations were almost unbearable now, like the tremendous surge of trembling power in an airliner the second before take-off, magnified a thousand fold. Lorinda slumped to the floor in a faint.

Dyke ran into the kitchen, if only he could find something to . . . Somehow, he gathered the strength to rip the door of one of the metal kitchen cabinets from its hinges. Using the door as a battering ram, he ran toward the window with all his strength. There was a jarring impact as the metal smashed into the "glass." It buckled outward but did not break. Dyke staggered back, shaken. Again and again he battered the metal door against the window, the metal curled and bent under the beating, the window gave . . . and gave . . . and finally broke, not shattering; like glass, but merely being penetrated; like tough plastic. He worked frantically, using the door now to ream a larger hole into the window.

Finally it was large enough so that he could ease Lorinda's unconscious form through the opening. She came to as she hit the ground outside with a jarring bump, and she was able to groggily help Dyke himself through the opening. They ran for the helicar, hand in hand, the still woozy Lorinda and the exhausted Dyke, dragging each other, stumbling, supporting each other, gasping for breath. They collapsed into the familiar bucket seats of the helicar and Dyke gave it full throttle. They did not look back.

Freev was angry and discouraged. Not only had two fine specimens escaped, they had damaged the skin of the Boat. He cut the engines disconsolately. It would take half the night to repair the damage and prepare for blast-off. He would also now have to dispose of the framework of the house, bury each nail and board. If he'd gotten the specimens he could have taken off right through the flimsy structure, leaving the wreckage, but now, no specimens. The Big Ship would have to come back—someday when more funds were voted by the directors of the Galactic Zoo and Museum Endowment Board—oh well, he was just a Hunter. Those problems were really not his concern. After all, he had done his best. Tricky creatures, these Solians III.

That night there was a bright streak across the sky for a second, thousands saw it. It must have been a falling meteor. The strange thing was that it appeared to be ascending, but then . . . the night sky plays funny tricks on the eyes.

DYKE and Lorinda, back in their tiny apartment, did not talk for a long time. For a while, they tried to act as though nothing had happened. Finally, Dyke blurted out, "Well, those sudden Earth tremors are a lot more frightening than they are serious. There must be an earth fault directly under the house. Just a bunch of rock settling, that's all."

"But Dyke, the doors . . . the windows . . . ?"

"Stuck. That's all, just stuck. The temblor got them out of alignment and they slammed shut and stuck." His mind dwelled uncomfortably on those desperate moments when he had battered "glass" with metal and the "glass" had refused to break. But then, they were always coming out with new plastics and things, weren't they?

Lorinda drew a long drag on her cigarette with a hand that still trembled slight-

ly. "But Dyke, we must tell the real estate agent. After all, no one must ever move into that house. It's dangerous, with earth faults under it and doors that won't open and . . ." she shivered.

"Okay, honey. In the morning we'll fly by and tell the agent, if it'll make you feel better."

The agent slowly flipped the pages of the black notebook in which he kept his listings. He gave them a long appraising look.

"Are you sure the house number was 7865?"

They both nodded. Dyke pulled a crumpled scrap of paper from his pocket. "I jotted it down before we went in, in case we should want to contact you about buying the house." He handed the paper to the agent, it said 7865.

The agent picked up a clipboard. He compared a listing to that in the black book. He shook his head slowly with an expression that was half wary and half embarrassed. "Er-you folks must be mistaken. There is no 7865. There's an empty lot between 7863 and 7867."

Lorinda gave a little squeal. "But we were there and there was an earthquake and . . ."

The agent looked distinctly uncomfortable. "Lady, we had a geological survey made of that entire area before the development was started. An earthquake there is virtually impossible. Besides, if there had been a quake, the seismograph at the university would have recorded it. Outside of that bright meteor last night nothing unusual was reported in the area, absolutely nothing. Now, if you folks are interested in a house we have several other nice little . . ."

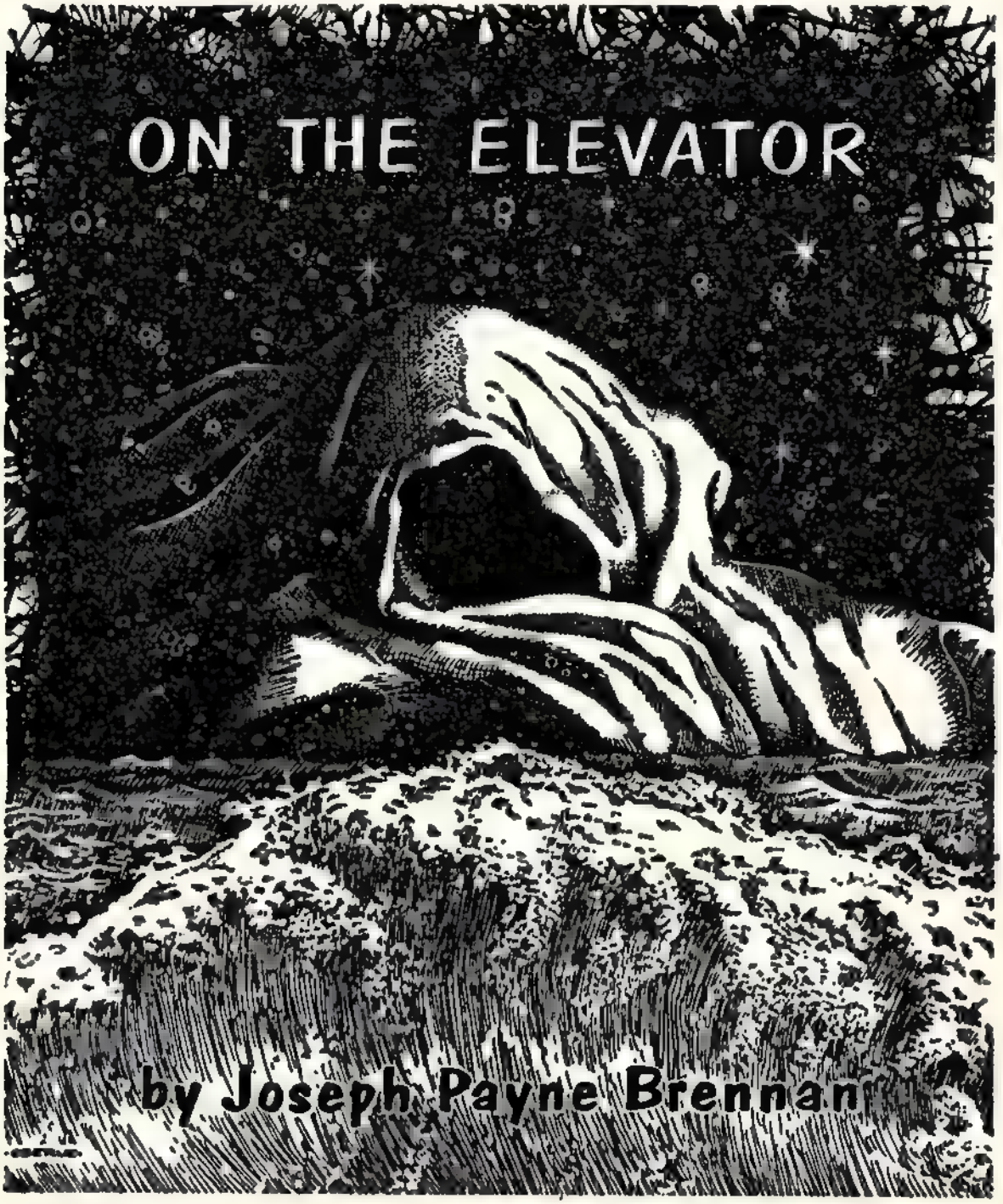
Lorinda placed both hands firmly on the man's desk and leaned close to him. She repeated in a tight little voice, "But we were there, and the windows wouldn't open and the floor vibrated and the house had no bathr . . ." She caught a warning glance from Dyke.

He placed a protective arm around his wife's shoulders. "Thank you, sir, I guess we . . . well, thank you very much anyway. Good morning." They left the agent shaking his head sadly. They had seemed like such a nice young couple, too.

IN THE helicar, Lorinda sobbed bitterly. "Ohhh Dyke, you know it happened. And you know it didn't have a bathroom. Who would build a house without a bathroom? Who? Answer me, who?"

Dyke patted her arm absently as he switched on the ignition. "I don't know, honey, I don't know. But you saw the look he gave us—the agent—the way he stared at us. Unless we want the little men with white coats easing us into nice comfortable strait-jackets, we better not say any more about it. Do you understand? Let's try to forget it. We must never mention it again," his hand trembled at the controls, "not even to each other."

Such a storm could rouse the demons of the deep; had it?



THE storm had been building up far out at sea since early morning; by evening the full fury of it broke against the beach fronts. Mountainous gray waves rushed up the slopes of sand, washed across the boardwalks and churned into streets which paralleled the shore. With the thundering waves came an icy rain and

Heading by Joseph Eberle

winds of gale velocity. As the evening wore on the storm raged unabated. A number of the flimsier beach cottages collapsed under its impact and waves hammered at the foundations of even the sturdiest beach-front buildings. The screaming wind sounded as if it would never stop blowing.

Torrents of rain mixed with sea water swirled far inland.

Somewhere at sea the violence of the storm had wrenched the rotted remains of a ship from its resting place in the ocean muck and now bits of the wreckage hurtled shoreward with the waves. Pieces of a broken spar, splintered deck timbers and brine-encrusted rags appeared along the beaches.

Whatever was cast up, however, remained totally unseen, for there was no one foolhardy enough to prowl the shore while such a storm still raged.

At eleven o'clock that evening the night clerk on duty in the lobby of the Atlas Hotel on Ocean Street seated himself in front of the switchboard and picked up a novel.

The switchboard seldom buzzed, and, due to the storm, most of the hotel guests had already gone up to their rooms. Except for the night clerk, the lobby was entirely deserted.

Outside, cold wind-driven rain, blown in from the open sea, beat steadily against the pavements along Ocean Street. A curtain of raindrops ran down the hotel's plate-glass windows and at intervals a sudden savage gust of wind drove rain against the glass with a sound like water being hurled out of a bucket.

OCCASIONALLY, when the buffeting of wind was at its worst, the night clerk glanced up from his book, scowled briefly toward the darkened, storm-lashed street, and then settled back to his reading.

As he progressed past the introductory chapters of his novel, the book's tempo began to quicken and his attention became almost completely absorbed. Even when the front door of the hotel was pushed open, he did not look up.

At length however, the draught of chill, moisture-laden air blowing into the lobby compelled his attention. Lifting his eyes from the book, he saw that the front door was wide open.

Frowning with irritation, he laid his book aside, got up and started across the lobby to close the door.

At first he thought that an unusually fierce gust of wind had somehow blown the door open. As he closed it however, he noticed a fresh series of irregularly-shaped muddy tracks which began just inside the door and continued on into the lobby.

He had not seen anyone enter the lobby and now he glanced around with some curiosity.

For a moment he saw no one at all. Then he noticed someone standing at the far end, near the self-service elevator. The person was leaning against the wall next to the elevator, apparently waiting for the lift to descend to the ground floor.

Something about the figure aroused the night clerk's interest. The man leaned against the wall as if standing upright were a distinct effort. He had an odd, limp, *collapsed* look. But perhaps that was caused by the shapeless black raincoat which he wore.

THE raincoat—a shiny, black rubber affair—simply had no shape at all. It was so long it nearly touched the floor. The sleeves looked as if they were a foot longer than the man's arms inside of them.

Discounting the raincoat however, it occurred to the night clerk that the man might be sick or injured—or perhaps merely drunk.

In any case, the clerk felt that perhaps he ought to help the man onto the elevator and see that he arrived safely at his room. It would take only two or three minutes, and there was little likelihood that any calls would come through the switchboard in that space of time. And if one did come through, it could wait.

But for some reason the clerk hesitated. He could not have put into words any tangible reason for his hesitation. It was simply that he felt strangely reluctant to

cross the lobby and escort the man in the black raincoat up to his room.

While he hesitated, the elevator arrived. The man leaning against the adjacent wall flung the door open with a swift movement, limped inside and closed the door behind him.

He had not once turned around, and when the night clerk finally arrived at the elevator and peered through the little glass window into the shaft, there was nothing in sight except the swaying steel cables.

Returning to his novel, the night clerk found that he could no longer concentrate on it. Questions about the man in the black raincoat kept entering his mind and distracting his attention. Why had the man left the hotel door wide open to the elements? How had he walked through the lobby without being seen? Why did he wear a raincoat which was much too large for him? Had he been ill, or drunk—or merely exhausted as a result of trudging back to the hotel through the sheets of cold, cutting rain?

It was nearly midnight before the clerk stopped asking himself questions about the man in the black raincoat. And then, just as he was beginning to get absorbed in the novel again, the switchboard buzzed.

A decidedly hysterical female voice smote his ear. The woman was quite obviously terrified, and very nearly incoherent, and the night clerk had difficulty in understanding her words. He gathered, finally, that she was calling from Room 311 on the third floor, that she had intended coming down to the lobby and that she had seen something on the elevator which had imbued her with pure terror.

After doing his best to reassure the woman, the night clerk promised to investigate at once and hung up.

WITH a feeling of guilt, he laid aside his novel and started across the lobby. It didn't require much imagination, he reflected, to picture what had happened. The man in the black raincoat had undoubtedly collapsed in the elevator and the woman in 311, chancing upon his sprawled form in the dimly-lighted lift, had been frightened half out of her wits.

After he had pushed the elevator button, the night clerk stood nervously waiting, with his hand already on the door handle. He tapped with his foot, swore, and rubbed his chin and still the elevator did not appear. Squinting through the small glass window, he saw that the thick cables were almost motionless. That meant the elevator was not in motion; it was not descending, but remained stationary on one of the floors above.

Muttering to himself, the night clerk started for the stairs. The fool woman, he decided, had probably left the elevator door ajar and thus stalled the conveyance.

Arriving on the third floor somewhat out of breath, he started down the hall toward the elevator. Then he remembered that he would pass Room 311 before reaching it and, that being the case, he thought that he might as well stop and offer the distraught female hotel guest another word of reassurance.

He tapped on the door and identified himself. There was a listening silence and he knocked again and called out, making little effort to disguise the irritation and impatience in his voice.

At length the woman inside answered in a muffled voice, a key turned in the lock and the door was opened a crack. With a face the color of white ashes, the terrified hotel guest stared out at the impatient night clerk.

"No need to be frightened," the clerk said. "A man collapsed in the elevator. Something was wrong with him when I saw him in the lobby. I'll make sure that he's not just drunk and then call a doctor."

The woman stared at him with round eyes. Her voice was just a whisper. "But—he—it—wasn't a man. It—didn't have *any face!*"

The night clerk stared back at her, a cold twinge assailing his stomach. The woman continued looking at him, wordlessly, as if she had said all that she could bear to say.

The night clerk's first impulse was to question the fear-ridden woman, but sudden anger—both at her and at himself—overcame him. Here he was listening to a hysterical woman while a man, obviously

injured, lay helpless in the elevator. Probably the man in the black raincoat had struck his face in falling and the woman stepping into the dim lift had seen a spreading smear of blood instead of distinct features.

Hesitating no longer, the night clerk curtly turned away and started down the corridor toward the elevator. Behind him he heard a door quickly slammed shut and the click of a key as it was locked.

Reaching the elevator, he saw that the door was firmly closed. He gripped the handle and pulled—and nothing happened. Looking through the little window, he saw again the slowly swaying steel cables and realized that the elevator had moved up to another floor.

He stood undecided, puzzled as to what he should do. Had the man recovered after all and gone on up to his room? Or had the woman imagined the entire episode? In any case, how had the elevator moved up to another floor when only five minutes earlier it had failed to respond to the call button? If the door had been open before, and was now closed, who had closed it?

HE WAS still hesitating when he heard a faint clash of metal echo down the elevator shaft. It sounded like the elevator door being slammed shut on a floor above. Pressing his face against the window, he saw the cable loop begin to descend.

He had just drawn back from the window when a sudden terrifying shriek rang out above. It went on and on, louder and louder, one continuous hoarse, howling cry of ultimate torment, and then there was a blur of movement in the shaft as the elevator shot past.

The night clerk remained rooted where he stood, utterly unnerved by that long-drawn howl of horror which was ringing in his ears.

The terrible cry finally subsided, ending in a series of dreadful moaning gasps which seemed to arise from far below.

Doors began opening along the corridor as frightened, pajama-clad hotel guests, aroused from sleep by the fearful scream, cautiously peered out to investigate its source.

For a full minute or more the night clerk remained weakly leaning against the elevator door. Finally, as a sense of responsibility stirred in him, he turned and called down the corridor: "Will someone please telephone for the police—and an ambulance?"

When he was assured that a police car and ambulance were on the way, the night clerk retreated down the corridor toward the staircase. In response to questions, he answered only that there had been "an accident on the elevator," and he urged the uneasy hotel guests to keep to their rooms and lock their doors until the police arrived.

He descended the stairs slowly and with vast reluctance, fearful of what he might meet at every turning. He had no desire whatsoever to enter the deserted lobby on the ground floor where he had seen the man in the black raincoat waiting for the elevator.

Luckily, a police car arrived at the front door of the hotel just as he reached the bottom of the staircase.

Sheets of rain still beat against the pavements outside. When the two dampened policemen hurried in, he explained the situation as well as he could, without adding any preamble or speculations of his own.

The officers seemed singularly unimpressed. "Probably this guy you saw got sick on the elevator, couldn't get out, and started yellin' for help," one of them said gruffly. "Let's take a look in the elevator."

When the lift failed to arrive in response to the button, the night clerk peered through the little window at the cables.

"I think it's stuck in the basement," he said.

A moment later he was leading the two policemen down the basement stairs.

Switching on the dim cellar lights, he led them toward the elevator.

The little light inside the lift had gone out and as they approached they saw that

NEXT ISSUE WE'LL BE DIGEST SIZE—LOOK FOR US JULY 1st.

W. T.

the elevator door was partially open. Something black and shapeless lay on the floor, half in and half out of the lift. It was this object, apparently, which had kept the door ajar and prevented the elevator from responding to the electric call button a few moments before.

One of the policemen produced a flashlight. They saw at once that the black object was a rubber raincoat, glistening and soaked with water.

Then the patrolman directed the beam of light into the elevator and the three of them stood rigid with shock and horror.

Inside the elevator the body of a portly, well-dressed man lay in a great puddle of blood. He had been savagely attacked. His face had been slashed until his features were unrecognizable. His throat was torn, and deep ragged gashes had been made in the jacket of his smart gray tweed jacket. They were so deep that they had penetrated all his clothing and blood oozed up out of them. He was quite beyond help.

In spite of the obliteration of the man's features, the night clerk recognized him as one of the hotel guests, a Mr. Traverson who maintained a small suite on the fifth floor. And he was sure, he told the two policemen, that it was *not* Mr. Traverson whom he had seen wearing the black raincoat.

The night clerk believed that Mr. Traverson had gotten onto the elevator on the fifth floor, while he himself was waiting for it on the third. And he was convinced now that it was Traverson's death screams which he had heard as the elevator shot past on its way to the basement.

BY THE time the ambulance attendants arrived and found that they had a corpse on their hands, the police had made several startling discoveries.

The black raincoat, they found, smelled of salt water and inside it they noticed several small bits of seaweed. More pertinent, they traced a series of fresh, irregularly-shaped muddy tracks which led from the elevator, through the basement, to an areaway which, surprisingly, had been left open —or had been opened—to the driving rain. Beyond this point, due to the sweeping torrents of water, the tracks were entirely washed away.

The subsequent search and investigation uncovered nothing further. Although a cordon of police was immediately thrown about the district, no likely suspects were apprehended. Mr. Traverson, the coroner decided, had met his death "at the hands of a person or persons unknown." The black raincoat proved useless as a clue, since all the labels had rotted away from it and there was nothing in any of its pockets except scraps of seaweed and a small mussel shell. The night clerk could add nothing further to what he had already told the police, and the frightened woman in 311 could only vouch that she was sure that it was *not* Mr. Traverson, living or dead, whom she had seen in the elevator. When questioned further she invariably became semi-hysterical and would only insist that whatever she *had* glimpsed in the lift did not possess any face.

It was said that one of the younger doctors in attendance at the Traverson autopsy suggested that the savage gashes might have been made, not by a weapon, but by the claws or fangs of a wild animal, or even, he hinted, by *incredibly long and powerful fingernails.* This melodramatic suggestion was of course dismissed by the senior doctors who officially reported the lethal wounds as caused by a knife "or other sharp instrument."

The Atlas Hotel lost a great many regular guests—including the woman in 311—and eventually the night clerk got a daylight shift in another hotel.

When questioned by curious reporters who for a long time refused to give up on the case, he would patiently describe the events of that shocking evening and then, when pressed for an explanation, he would shake his head and say, "Well, if you ask me chum, that murderin' thing in the black raincoat was something dead that came up out of the sea!"

Do they answer telephones in hell?

Dread Summons

BY PAUL ERNST

HERB MELLER stared at the great house on Chicago's chief boulevard with a grim and savage pride, the house that had once belonged to that bleak old financier, R. J. Hill.

The structure was six stories tall, containing nearly forty rooms. It was a palace; built thirty years before at a cost of over two million dollars; situated now on land so valuable that if it were covered with gold pieces the sum would hardly approximate its worth.

A palace! One of the costliest buildings in Chicago! Yet it was but a fraction of what Meller had wrested from the Hill estate. He had looted millions from the fortune of the ferocious old man who had taken so long in dying. This house on the boulevard faded into insignificance when compared to the total.

Yet for Herbert Meller it was a symbol, and its possession gave him more exultation than all the rest. The very citadel and personal pride of old Hill had been won when

Heading by A. V. DiGiannurio

he took that house away from Hill's spinster daughter.

Meller walked from the sidewalk to the great flags leading up to the door of the palace. He stared with swelling approval of himself at the ponderous iron grillework of the front door. Born on the wrong side of the tracks, eh? Well, he'd shown Hill and all his crew.

There was a thrill in finding the key to the house on his fat-ring. "I don't know that you'll want to bother looking in the old mausoleum," the agent had said, giving him the key, "as long as it is to be torn down so soon anyway."

But he had wanted to look through it. In a week, men would be here to dismantle the house, which had become a positive liability through the years, a worthless lump of stone and splendor on an invaluable site. A hotel corporation had bought the place for that site. The Hill home was only in the way.

He inserted the key in the massive lock. Imported from Italy, the iron grillework of the door had been. Old Hill had spread himself on his house.

"Much good it did him!" Meller spat viciously as he worked with the key.

Meller always saw red when he thought of the grim, hard old man. A blatant pusher, a cheap gambler, Hill had called Meller. The old man had refused steadily to have anything to do with the ruthless young fellow who was springing so far and so swiftly from the slums. "Damned young slug," the old man had said once—to his face. And Meller had never forgotten nor forgiven.

THE door suddenly opened as he was fiddling with the key. An old man, at least seventy, dressed in a plain blue serge suit faced him in the doorway.

Meller was startled for a moment. Then he remembered that the old Hill butler had volunteered to stay on as caretaker till the place was torn down—for nothing. The old fool!

"Yes, sir?" the butler quavered, inquiringly.

"I'm Meller."

The announcement made no impression.

"The man who owns this house now," Meller said impatiently.

"Oh! Oh, yes, sir. And you want to look around?"

Meller nodded and pushed his way in. He was shorter than the old servant; a short fat man who, even at forty-one, puffed a little as he walked and perspired freely from a fat, rather apoplectic-looking countenance.

"Shall I direct you, sir?" said the butler.

"No." Meller clipped it out harshly. "Get out of here. I can find my own way around, I guess."

"Very good, sir. There is the elevator."

He pointed with a gnarled old hand to an automatic cage at the rear of the front hall. And Meller almost snarled as he gazed at that. An elevator in a private home! In the home he'd been raised in there hadn't even been a bathroom or electricity.

"All right," he said, more to himself than to the servant. He walked toward the elevator, meanwhile looking at the hall of this home in which he would once have been treated as dirt but which was now his —at least till the hotel people tore it down.

He tapped irritably at the floor with his cane. The wood was as ornate, as beautifully inlaid as a table-top. It woke savage hate in him. The ferrule of his stick was of metal and scuffed to a sharp rim around the edge. He dug deep with the ferrule and then dragged the cane after him.

A great raw scratch resulted in the softly polished, lovely wood. Behind him, Meller heard the old servant gasp as though he had been struck.

"What the hell?" said Meller harshly. "The joint's coming down soon anyway."

He made more scratches, as if he had his stick in the face of old Hill himself. He spelled his name in raw tears in the inlaid wood, laughing as he did so. Then he went on to the elevator.

An elevator in a private house! It still annoyed him, particularly such a little jewel-case as this mahogany and rosewood cage that bore him silently up toward the second floor at a touch of his finger.

THERE was gilt inlay in the panels. He amused himself by scratching some of it out with his stick on the way up. Then

the cage stopped. He opened the door and stepped into a second-floor hall which was smaller than the first-floor reception hall but even more luxurious. The floor was of marble, as were the curving stairs up from the first floor. The marble was bare. The interminable, specially woven strip of oriental carpeting that had padded the staircase and stretched down the corridor had been sold by Hill's daughter along with the other furnishings. Meller's heels rang as he walked down it.

Rooms! An acre of rooms! But he wasn't going to go through all of them. He only wanted to see the suites belonging to old Hill and the wife whose death had been such a shock to him, and the daughter who was now virtually penniless as the result of Meller's clever manipulations. Those three master suites were on this floor.

He walked into the door opposite the elevator cage. He entered what seemed an entire apartment, but eventually resolved itself into two great rooms, with alcoves resulting from the Victorian architecture which was the characteristic of the place. Two huge rooms. One a bedroom, done in dark ivory with walnut trim, opening onto a vast and masculine-looking bath; the other a paneled living room and library.

This was old Hill's suite. The very air breathed of the bitter old man who till his death had held his associates and enemies, particularly his enemies, in awe of him.

Hill's home had been his love, his fortress. This two-room suite had been the heart of the home, inviolate from all trespassing, dedicated to the fierce nonagenarian who had wrung from a world of smoke and blood and grime the great fortune that had melted at his death.

Meller laughed. There was a mirror on one wall from floor to ceiling. He walked to it, and laughed again. Then his cane lashed out viciously. Thick, that mirror. Quadruple plate. Built to last, as all Hill's things were. It took three ringing cracks before the mirror broke. Then it fairly cascaded to the floor, making a great clatter on the inlaid wood.

The house seemed as still as a tomb when the clatter ceased. In the silence Meller stood with a funny feeling in the pit of his paunch. He felt a little afraid, somehow. It was his mirror to break if he pleased. It might as well be broken now as later when the house was ripped down.

And yet, he felt—well, funny.

He could almost see Hill coming toward him from the bedroom, grizzled eyebrows drawn together in the savage knot that had made so many tremble. A tyrannical, powerful, frightening old man.

Meller's too-plump shoulders straightened. No, he wouldn't admit it. By God, he hadn't been afraid of old Hill. That time the old man had figuratively thrown him out of his office by simply walking toward him, while Meller retreated step by step from his blazing eyes—he hadn't been afraid of Hill, he had simply shown him the respect any younger man gives an old one. The time Hill had almost gotten every cent Meller owned in the steel mill deal—

Meller snarled. Well, Hill had died before that went through. And now he had Hill's hide! Or rather the hide Hill had bequeathed to the dreamy-eyed, silly, retiring woman of forty-five who was his daughter.

MELLER turned to the near wall. In a gesture that was childish, though it did not occur to him as being such, he spat on the immaculate cream surface, like the little foul-mouthed, milk-stealing gutter urchin he had once been. With satisfaction he watched the smearing trickle that resulted; watched it spatter slowly down on the fragments of mirror.

Seven years' bad luck, the mirror was supposed to represent. But he wasn't superstitious. He didn't believe in such junk.

He left the rooms that were like an empty shell waiting only for the return of their grim master, and went to the next apartment.

Two rooms here, too. All in pink. Must have been Hill's wife's rooms. Yes, there was a picture of the old boy on a wall between two great windows. The sale hadn't taken in this picture, probably because it was intrinsically worthless. An oil painting of the old man's head, about eighteen inches square.

Meller laughed again and thrust the ferrule of his stick slowly through the canvas till the wall stopped it. He thrust the metal through the old man's nose—that formidable beak that had matched in jutting power his craggy old jaw. Then he went on to the third suite on this side of the hall; a suite the door of which was just at the head of the great marble staircase.

This was in French gray with silver trim. It too had been a woman's apartment; but the apartment of a younger woman. It took no subtle intuition to read that. It had belonged without doubt to Hill's daughter.

Meller visioned the daughter. A woman, but so sheltered from life by a doting father that she was no more knowledgable than a girl of eighteen. A person so sensitive and shy and retiring that she was almost a hermit. That was why she had never married, probably. Well, too damned bad for her. Should have a husband to support for her now. Meller doubted if she would have fifty dollars a month out of the wreck he had made of her father's fortune.

Meller grinned. The daughter, Beatrice Hill, had actually sought him out for financial advice. Hill's lawyer, that old spider Macy, was responsible for that. After a fat bribe, he had told the daughter that Meller was to be trusted implicitly, that Meller had become Hill's closest associate just before his death.

So Beatrice Hill had come like a damned fool to her father's bitterest enemy. For advice! Well, he'd given her advice. He had shifted worthless securities on her in carload lots. Then he had made loans when her inherited fortune seemed to be in danger. Then, when the worthless securities he had "accepted" as "collateral" shook on the market, he had refused extension of the loans, and taken the whole. Had simply opened his hand and closed it on everything Hill had left. Beatrice had a small trust fund from her mother, that was all.

He had got revenge on the tribe of Hill, all right! He'd been told that Beatrice tried to kill herself.

The rooms were delicately beautiful, in a way representing the spirit of the girl who had grown to womanhood in them. There were no overhead lights. The lamps were in wall brackets. These brackets were of carved crystal, and from the lamp-rings hung festoons of glittering crystal. Prisms, pear drops, pendants.

Meller stared at the softly glittering beauty of the crystals. Then his ever ready stick came up again. He lashed hard at one of the brackets. A shower of broken crystal, like dew-drops in sunlight, flashed to the polished floor. He went to the next, and did the same. In a moment there wasn't a crystal bracket left, in either bedroom or sitting-room. And with each thrust of his stick he felt as though he were smashing, hurting Hill himself.

In the bedroom he came upon something that once more drew laughter from his snarling lips, at the same time angering him when he recalled the home his own boyhood had known.

Near the living room door, set in onyx in the wall, were a dozen little switch-handles. They were tiny ebony plugs in a house phone system.

There was something for you, by heaven! A private telephone system for the house alone. An elevator in a private home; a complete telephone service. The old pirate had done well for himself, hadn't he?

He read the names etched in tiny copper plates under the bell plugs. Butler, garage, housekeeper, first guest room, second guest room, drawing-room, blue room, conservatory, Mrs. R. J. Hill, Mr. R. J. Hill—

Meller's cane raised to slash at the little switchboard, but slowly it lowered again. His snarling grin, like the grimace of a hyena over carrion that is all, all his, touched his red, sensual lips.

A bell for R. J. Hill, eh? When his daughter wanted to talk to her father she pulled that little ebony handle, and the old boy answered. Ring R. J. Hill.

Well, Hill was in hell now. Quite poetical that sounded. Hill in hell. Too bad his daughter couldn't try to put through a call for the old man now! Just as, in her helplessness, she had called on her father when she learned what had happened to his fortune. Standing in Meller's office, staring at Meller with incredulous, stricken eyes.

"Dad! Dad—"

Yeah! Call for R. J. Hill, and see what good it would do you.

The idea tickled Meller's not-too-sensitive sense of humor. Call for R. J. Hill. Page R. J. Hill. He ought to be in that end pot of boiling oil, boy. Get his attention, if the devils will let him alone for a minute, and tell him Herb Meller is paging him. Meller, the man he despised in life, and who has beaten him now. Call for Hill, from Mr. Meller. Maybe the old guy would come from hell in answer.

Meller's grin spread. His pudgy hand went up to the little switchboard. He touched with a tentative finger the plug over the name of the eagle-beaked old man who had awed him in life, but whom he had beaten in death.

Then, he pulled the little plug down. It was just like an office switchboard; the same in principle, if built of more elaborate materials. He was familiar with its workings.

He heard a bell ring, very softly, from somewhere. Old R. J.'s apartment? Or in hell?

It pleased him to imagine that he heard a faint, gruff voice answering. The voice of the man who had overpowered bankers and frightened promoters by sheer savage force of character.

"Hello," he said into the little phone. "Is this you, Hill? Is this you, you old—"

Profanity streamed from his lips.

"How do you like the owner of your house, Hill? Tell me I'm a crook who only stays out of jail because of the technicalities of the law, will you? Call me a shyster promoter and a robber of widows and orphans, will you? Announce before a board of directors that no decent man of business would associate with me? All right, now what do you think of me?"

He snapped the little lever back into place. Call R. J. Hill! Ring him in hell, and console him with what Meller had done to his daughter!

With his cane twirling jauntily, Meller went to the suite's bathroom. As big as a full room. Silver fittings; more crystal wall brackets. A pink marble tub. Would Beatrice Hill pass this site when there was a twenty-story hotel on it, and dream of that pink tub—taken from her, along with everything else, by the man who had outsmarted old Hill in the end?

Meller lit a cigar and tossed the burnt match into the tub. He went back to the sitting-room, grinning at the switchboard as he passed. Call R. J. Hill, eh?

The hall door had swung almost closed behind him when he entered Beatrice Hill's apartment. Just before he got to it, to go out, he stopped. He thought he had heard a step outside and below. A slow step. . . .

He shrugged, as it was not repeated. He must have imagined the sound. But it put him in mind of the way old R. J. had walked in the last few years of his life. His feet had gone bad on him. When he couldn't avoid walking, he had done it like a slow-motion picture. Slow, painful progress forward. Step by step on aching old feet. He had walked that way when he forced Meller from his office. Slow step after slow step, with Meller retreating back from his flaming old eyes. . . .

Another step. On the bare marble staircase, it seemed to be. A slow, dragging step. Unless he was still imagining—"

No, there it was a third time. Distinctly a step. And it did seem to ring familiar. For a moment Meller tried to tell himself that he couldn't place the familiarity. But he could, all right. The step sounded—precisely like the step of old Hill.

He stared toward the switchboard and a feeling of chill touched his spine. He had summoned Hill. Had Hill—answered?

It was a crazy thought. He laughed aloud, and puffed at the cigar in his teeth. He was reaching for the knob when he heard the step again. Slow, labored. On the staircase. Just like Hill's painful crawl. . . .

Hell, it was the butler! The old man was coming up to investigate the crash of that mirror, or of the crystal brackets.

But he'd have been up here before now, if that were the case. Quite a while had elapsed since he had made a noise up here. Besides, the butler was an old fossil, just like Hill. He'd have used the elevator if he meant to come up. . . .

Meller began to sweat a little. All the time he had been standing there thinking, he had been hearing the steps, slowly, laboriously ascending the stairs. The butler, of

course, he insisted to himself, wiping perspiration from his flabby face.

Thump, thump. A step at a time. A slow, painful crawl. God, it did sound like Hill!

Meller began to wish to heaven he had not pushed the phone switch over Hill's name. He wished he hadn't called those things into the phone. Had he heard a faint hello when he first lifted the receiver?

"I'm full of the jitters," he muttered aloud, listening to the slow, slow steps up the interminable marble staircase.

Listening to the steps. One step at a time, as if a feeble but determined body were hitching itself up a stair at a time and then resting.

"You out there," he called. "Butler—"

He had called it loudly. Echoes rang in the gray and silver room. His voice must have carried to the person on the stairs.

But there was no answer. Only more of the slow, labored steps. Closer now. Very near the top. And the door he was facing, the door he was so near, was right at the head of the stairs.

"Hey—you—out there—"

It was almost a scream that came from Meller's lips. Mad or not, the thought that that might really be Hill, come in answer to the blasphemous call, was drowning him in horror. Those slow steps were so exactly like old Hill's.

Step. A rest. Step. A pause. Step, step. Heavily, wearily, but indomitably, as someone—someone—ascended the stairs outside.

"My God—"

It was a moan that came from Meller's stiff lips. His cigar lay smoking on the bare floor. Then he drew a deep breath. Why, he was really trembling! This was a hell of a note! Meller, many times a millionaire at forty-one, feared as few in Chicago were feared—trembling in a vacant room at the sound of steps!"

"You out there! If you're the butler—say so!"

The steps paused—at the top of the stairs. And there was no answer.

Meller's last courage began seeping out of him. His fingers went up tremulously. He plucked at his shaking lips. The steps resumed, with infinite effort, infinite doggedness. They stopped outside the door.

Was it the butler out there, or wasn't it?

But it was, of course! Oh, God, it had to be! A dead man obey a summons of the living? No, no! That wasn't possible. Even in a deepening sea of horror that made his heart pound till he could taste blood in his mouth, he knew that.

The door moved a very little. He wouldn't have noticed it if he hadn't been staring right at it with glaring eyeballs. It had been an inch or so open. Now it was two inches. Swinging open a very little. As if only a breath of pressure had been applied to it. Pressure such as no real hand, no flesh-and-blood hand, would exert. . . .

"I can't stand this!" Meller panted. "I'm being a fool—"

His hand went out. He clutched the knob of the door.

He knew it was the servant out there. Hell—who else could it be? There were only the two of them in that house. Only the two of them. . . .

The door moved a little against his hand. Moved, slyly, eerily—not as any normal person would have moved it. The butler, by God—deliberately trying to frighten him! It had to be the butler!

He flung the door open with a scream that echoed through the whole great house, flung the door open—and stood swaying there; stood swaying and stricken for a few seconds before he fell. . . .

It was half an hour before the butler came up the stairs. He had been in the kitchen. He had thought for a moment he'd heard a scream. But it was not repeated, so he had paid no more attention. The walls of the old mansion were thick.

He screamed himself, now, as he got to the top of the stairs and saw the thing in the doorway of Miss Beatrice Hill's apartment. Screamed just once and cowered back.

The man who had called himself Meller lay there, and his face—his face—

The butler managed to get to the phone in the hall and call the police. Then he fainted, as if he had been a woman.

He had never before looked at the face of a man who had been frightened to death.

. . . one and all they turned their long dead eyes upon me with a curious fixity. . . .

The Sea Witch

BY NICTZIN DYALIS

HELDRA HELSTROM entered my life in a manner peculiarly her own. And while she was the most utterly damnable woman in all the world, at the same time, in my opinion, she was the sweetest and the most superbly lovely woman who ever lived.

A three-day northeast gale was hammering at the coast. It was late in the fall of the year, and cold as only our North Atlantic coast can very well be, but in the very midst of the tempest I became afflicted with a mild form of claustrophobia. So I donned sea-boots, oilskins and sou'wester hat, and sallied forth for a walk along the shore.

My little cottage stood at the top of a high cliff. There was a broad, safe path running down to the beach, and down it I hurried. The short winter day was even then drawing to a close, and after I'd trudged a quarter of a mile along the shore, I decided I'd best return to my comfortable fireside. The walk had at least given me a good appetite.

There was none of the usual lingering twilight of a clear winter evening. Darkness fell so abruptly I was glad I'd brought along a powerful flashlight. I'd almost reached the foot of my path up the cliff when I halted, incredulous, yet desiring to make sure.

I turned the ray of the flashlight on the great comber just curling to break on the shore, and held the light steady, my breath gasping in my throat. Such a thing as I thought I'd seen couldn't be—yet it was!

I started to run to the rescue, and could not move a foot. A power stronger than my own will held me immovable. I could only watch, spellbound. And even as I stared, that gigantic comber gently subsided, depositing its precious living burden on

Heading by Jon Arfstrom

the sands as softly as any nurse laying a babe into a cradle.

Waist-deep in a smother of foam she stood for a brief second, then calmly waded ashore and walked with free swinging stride straight up the beam of my flashlight to where I stood.

Regardless of the hellish din and turmoil of the tempest, I thrilled, old as I am, at the superb loveliness of this most amazing specimen of flotsam ever a raging sea cast ashore within memory of man.

Never a shred of clothing masked her matchless body, yet her flesh glowed rosy-white, when by all natural laws it should have been blue-white from the icy chill of wintry seas.

"Well!" I exclaimed. "Where did you come from? Are you real—or am I seeing that which is not?"

"I am real," replied a clear, silvery voice. "And I came from out there." An exquisitely molded arm flung a gesture toward the raging ocean. "The ship I was on was sinking, so I stripped off my garb, flung myself on Ran's bosom, and Ran's horses gave me a most magnificent ride! But well for you that you stood still as I bade you, while I walked ashore. Ran is an angry god, and seldom well diposed toward mortals."

"Ran?" The sea-god of the old Norse vikings! What strange woman was this who talked of "Ran and his horses," the white-maned waves of old ocean? But then I bethought me of her naked state in that unholy tempest.

"Surely you must be Ran's daughter," I said. "That reef is ten miles off land! Come —I have a house near by, and comforts—you cannot stand here."

"Lead, and I will follow," she replied simply.

She went up that path with greater ease than I, and walked companionably beside me from path-top of house, although she made no talk. Oddly, I felt that she was reading me, and that what she read gave her comfort.

When I opened the door, it seemed as if she held back for a merest moment.

"Enter," I bade her, a bit testily. "I should think you'd had enough of this weather by now!"

She bowed her head with a natural stateliness which convinced me that she was no common person, and murmured something too low for me to catch, but the accents had a distinct Scandinavian trend.

"What did you say?" I queried, for I supposed she'd spoken to me.

"I invoked the favor of the old gods on the hospitable of heart, and on the sheltering rooftree," she replied. Then she crossed my threshold, but she reached out her arm and rested her shapely white hand lightly yet firmly on my left forearm as she stepped within.

She went direct to the big stove, which was glowing dull-red, and stood there, smiling slightly, calm, serene, wholly ignoring her nakedness, obviously enjoying the warmth, and not by a single shiver betraying that she had any chill as result of exposure.

"I think you need this," I said, proffering a glass of brandy. "There's time enough for exchanging names and giving explanations, later," I added. "But right now, I'll try and find something for you to put on. I have no woman's things in the house, as I live alone, but will do the best I can."

I passed into by bedroom, laid out a suit of pajamas and a heavily quilted bathrobe, and returned to the living room where she stood.

"You are a most disconcertingly beautiful young woman," I stated bluntly; "which you know quite well without being told. But doubtless you will feel more at ease if you go in there and don some things I've laid out for you. When you come out, I'll get some supper ready."

She was back instantly, still unclad. I stared, wonderingly.

"Those things did not fit," she shrugged. "And that heavy robe—in this warm house?"

"But—" I began.

"But—this," she smiled, catching up a crimson silk spread embroidered in gold, which covered a sandalwood table I'd brought from the orient many years before. A couple of swift motions and the gorgeous thing became a wondrous robe adorning her lovely figure, clinging, and in some subtle manner hinting at the flawless splen-

dor of her incomparable body. A long narrow scarf of black silk whereon twisted a silver dragon was whipped from its place on a shelf and transposed into a sash from her swelling breasts to her sloping hips, bringing out more fully every exquisite curve of her slender waist and torso—and she smiled again.

"Now," she laughed softly, "am I still a picture for your eyes? I hope so, for you have befriended me this night—I who sorely need a friend; and it is such a little thing I can do—making myself pleasing in your sight.

"And because you have holpen me"—I stared at the archaic form she used—"and will continue to aid and befriend (for so my spirit tells me), I will love you always, love you as Ragnar Wave-Flame loved Jarl Wulf Red-Brand . . . as a younger sister, or a dutiful niece."

"Yet of her it is told," I interrupted, deliberately speaking Swedish and watching keenly to see the effect, "that the love given by the foam-born Sea-Witch brought old Earl Wulf of the Red-Sword but little luck, and that not of a sort desired by most men!"

"That is ill said," she retorted. "His fate was from the Norns, as is the fate of all. Not hers the fault of his doom, and when his carles within the hour captured his three slayers, she took red vengeance. With her own foam-white hands she flayed them alive, and covered their twitching bodies with salt ere she placed the old Jarl in his long-ship and set it afire. And she sailed with that old man on his last seafaring, steering his blazing dragon-ship out of the stead, singing of his great deeds in life, that the heroes in Valhalla might know who honored them by his coming."

She paused, her superb bosom heaving tumultuously. Then with a visible effort she calmed herself.

"But you speak my tongue, and know the old tales of the Skalds. Are you, then, a Swede?"

"I speak the tongue, and the old tales of the Skalds, the ancient minstrels, I learned from my grandmother, who was of your race."

"Of my race?" her tone held a curious inflection. "Ah, yes! All women are of one race . . . perhaps."

"But I spoke of supper," I said, moving toward the kitchen.

"But—no!" She barred my progress with one of her lovely hands laid flat against my chest. "It is not meet and fitting, Jarl Wulf, that you should cook for me, like any common house-carle! Rather, let your niece, Heldra, prepare for you a repast."

" 'Heldra'? That, then, is your name?"

"Heldra Helstrom, and your loving niece," she nodded.

"But why call me Jarl Wulf?" I demanded, curious to understand. She had bestowed the name seriously, rather than in playful banter.

"Jarl Wulf you were, in a former life," she asserted flatly. "I knew you on the shore, even before Ran's horse stood me on my feet!"

"Surely, then, you must be Ragnar Wave-Flame born again," I countered.

"How may that be?" she retorted. "Ragnar Wave-Flame never died; and surely I do not look that old! The seaborn witch returned to the sea-caves whence she came, when the dragon-ship burned out. . . . But ask me not of myself, now.

"Yet one thing more I will say: The warp and woof of this strange pattern wherein we both are depicted was woven of the Norns ere the world began. We have met before—we meet again, here and now—we shall meet yet again; but how, and when, and where, I may not say."

"Of a truth, you are 'fey'," I muttered.

"At times—I am," she assented. Then her wondrous sapphire eyes gleamed softly into my own hard gray eyes, her smile was tender, wistful, womanly, and my doubts were dissipated like wisps of smoke. Yet I shook an admonitory forefinger at her:

"Witch at least I know you to be," I said in mock harshness. "Casting glamyr on an old man."

"No need for witchery," she laughed. "All women possess that power!"

DURING the "repast" she spread before me, I told her that regardless of who I might have been in a dim and remote past of which I had no memory, in this

present life I was plain John Craig, retired professor of anthropology, ethnology and archeology, and living on a very modest income. I explained that while I personally admired her, and she was welcome to remain in my home for ever, yet in the village near by were curious minds, and gossiping tongues, and evil thoughts a-plenty, as if I were to tell the truth of her arrival—

"But I have nowhere to go, and none save you to befriend me; all I loved or owned is out there." Again she indicated the general direction of the reef. "And you say that I may remain here, indefinitely? I will be known as your niece, Heldra, no? Surely, considering the differences in our age and appearance, there can be no slander."

Her eyes said a thousand things no words could convey. There was eagerness, sadness, and a strange tenderness. . . . I came to an abrupt decision. After all, whose business was it?

"I am alone in the world, as you are," I said gravely. "As my niece, Heldra, you shall remain. If you will write out a list of a woman's total requirements in wearing apparel, I will send away as soon as possible and have them shipped here in haste. I am old, as all can see, and I do not think any sensible persons will suspect aught untoward in your making your home with me. And I will think up a plausible story which will satisfy the minds of fools without telling, in reality, anything."

Our repast ended, we arose from the table and returned to the living room. I filled and lighted a nargilyeh, a three-stemmed water-pipe, and settled myself in my armchair. She helped herself to a cigarette from a box on the table, then stretched her long, slender body at full length on my divan, in full relaxation of comfort.

I told her enough of myself and my forebears to insure her being able to carry out the fiction of being my niece. And in return I learned mighty little about her. But what she did tell me was sufficient. I never was unduly curious about other people's business.

Unexpectedly, and most impolitely, I yawned. Yet it was natural enough, and it struck me that she herself needed a rest, if anyone ever did. But before I could speak, she forestalled me.

With a single graceful movement she rose from her reclining posture and came and stood before me within easy arm's-reach. Two swift motions, and her superb body flashed rosy-white, as nude as when she waded ashore.

The crimson silken spread she'd worn as regally as any robe was laid at my feet with a single gesture, the black scarf went across my knees, and the glorious creature was kneeling before me in attitude of absolute humility. Before I could remonstrate or bid her arise, her silvery voice rang softly, solemnly, like a muted trumpet:

"Thus, naked and with empty hands, out of the wintry seas in a twilight gray and cold, on a night of storm I came. And you lighted a beacon for my tired eyes, that I might see my way ashore. You led me up the cliff and to your hospitable hearth, and in your kindly heart you had already given the homeless a home.

"And now, kneeling naked before you, as I came, I place my hands between your hands—thus—and all that I am, and such service as I can render, are yours, handgasted."

I stared, well-nigh incredulous. In effect, in the old Norse manner, she was declaring herself to all intents and purposes my slave! But her silvery voice went on:

"And now, I rise and cover myself again with the mantle of your bounty, that you may know me, indeed your niece, as Jarl Wulf knew Ragnar Wave-Flame!"

"Truly," I gasped in amazement when I could catch my breath, "you are a strange mixture of the ancient days and this modern period. I have known you but for a few hours, yet I feel toward you as that old Jarl must have felt toward that other sea-witch, unless indeed you and she are one!"

"Almost," she replied a trifle somberly. "At least, she was my ancestress!" Then she added swiftly: "Do not misunderstand. Leman to the old Jarl she never was. But later, after he went to Valhalla, in the sea-girt isle where she dwelt she mated with a young viking whom Ran had cast ashore sorely wounded and insensible. She nursed

him back to life for sake of his beauty, and he made love to her.

"But he soon tired of her and her witch ways; wherefore, in wrath she gave him back to Ran—and he was seen no more. Of that mating was born a daughter, also given to Ran, who pitied her and bore her to an old man and his wife whose steading was nigh to the mouth of a fjord; and they, being childless, called her Ranhild, and reared her as their daughter. In course of time, she wed, and bore three tall sons and a daughter. . . .

"That was long and long ago—yet I have dived into Ragnar's hidden sea-cave and talked with Ragnar Wave-Flame face to face. All one night I lay in her arms, and in the dawning she breathed her breath on my brow, lips, and bosom; and all that following day she talked and I listened, and much I learned of the wisdom that an elder world termed witchcraft."

For a moment she lapsed into silence. Then she leaned forward, laid her shapely, cool hands on my temples and kissed me on my furrowed old forehead, very solemnly, yet with ineffable gentleness.

"And now," she murmured, "ask me never again aught concerning myself, I pray you; for I have told all I may, and further questioning will drive me back to the sea. And I would not have that happen—yet!"

WITHOUT another word she turned, flung herself at full length again on the divan, and, like any tired child, went instantly to sleep. Decidedly, I thought, this "niece" of mine was not as are other women; and later I found that she possessed certain abilities it is well for the world that few indeed can wield.

She gave me another proof of that belief, by demonstrating her unholy powers, on the night of the next full moon after her arrival.

It was her custom of an evening to array herself as she had done on her first night—in crimson robe and black sash and naught else, despite the fact that her wardrobe which I had ordered from the great city forty miles away contained all any woman's heart could wish for. But I admit I enjoyed seeing her in that semibarbaric attire.

At times she would sit on the arm of my chair, often with her smooth cool cheek laid against my rough old face, and her exquisitely modeled arm curved about my leathery old neck. The first time she had done that, I had demanded ironically:

"Witch, are you making love to me?"

But her sighing, wistful reply had disarmed me, and likewise had brought a lump into my throat.

"Nay! Not that, O Jarl from of old! But—I never knew a father."

"Nor I a fair daughter," I choked. And thereafter, when that mood was upon her I indulged in no more ironies, and we'd sit for hours, neither speaking, engrossed in thoughts for which there are no words. But on the night whereof I write, she pressed her scarlet lips to my cheek, and I asked jestingly:

"Is there something you want, Heldra?"

"There is," she replied gravely. "Will you get a boat—one with oars and a sail, but no engine? Ran hates those."

"But surely you do not want it now, tonight, do you?"

"Yes, if you will be so kind to me."

"You must have a very good reason, or you'd not ask," I said. "I'll go and get a centerboard dory and bring it to the beach at the foot of the cliff path. It's clear moderate breeze blowing; yet it is colder on the water than you imagine, so you'd best bundle up warmly."

"You will hasten," she implored anxiously.

"Surely," I nodded.

I went out and down to the wharves in the village, where I kept the boat I said I'd get. But when I beached the dory at foot of the path I stared, swearing softly under my breath. Not one stitch of apparel did that witch have on, save the crimson silk robe and black sash she'd worn when I left the cottage!

"Do you want to freeze?" I was provoked, I admit. "The very sight of you dressed like that gives me the shivers!"

"Neither you nor I will be cold this night," she laughed. "Isn't it glorious? And this is a good boat you brought. Please, let me sail it, and ask me no questions."

She took the tiller, hauled in on the

sheet; the sail filled, and she began singing, with a queer, wild strain running through her song. That dory fairly flew—and I swear there was not enough wind to drive us to such speed.

Finally I saw something I didn't admire. No one does, who dwells on that part of the coast.

"Are you crazy, girl?" I demanded sharply. "That reef is dead ahead! Can't you see the breakers?"

"Why, so it is—the reef! And am I to be affrighted by a few puny breakers? Nay, it is in the heart of those breakers that I wish to be! But you—have you fear, O Jarl Wulf?"

I suspected from her tone that the witch was laughing at me; so I subsided, but fervently wished that I'd not been so indulgent of her whim for a moonlight sail on a cold winter's night.

THEN we hit those breakers—or rather, we didn't! For they seemed to part as the racing dory sped into them, making a smooth clear lane of silvery glinting water over which we glided as easily as if on a calm inland mill-pond!

"Drop the sail and unstep the mast," she called suddenly.

I was beyond argument, and obeyed dumbly, like any boat-carle of the olden days.

"Now, take to the oars," she directed, "and hold the boat just hereabouts for a while," and even as I slid the oars into the oarlocks she made that swift movement of hers and stood nude, the loveliest sight that grim, ship-shattering, life-destroying reef had ever beheld.

Suddenly she flung up both shapely white arms with a shrill, piercing cry, thrice repeated. Then without a word she went overside in a long clean dive, with never a splash to show where she'd hit the water.

"Hold the boat about here for a while," she'd bidden me! All I'd ever loved in this world was somewhere down below, in the hellish cross-currents of that icy water! I'd hold that boat there, if need were, in the teeth of a worse tempest than raged the night she came to me. She'd find me waiting. And if she never came up, I'd hold that boat there till its planks rotted and I joined her in the frigid depths.

It seemed an eternity, and I know that it was an hour ere a glimmer of white appeared beneath the surface. Then her shapely arm emerged and her hand grasped the gunwale, her regal head broke water, she blew like a porpoise; then she laughed in clear ringing triumph.

"You old dearling!" she cried in her archaic Norse. "Did I seem long gone? The boat has not moved a foot from where I dove. Come, bear a hand and lift my burden; it is heavy, and I am near spent. There are handles by which to grasp it."

The burden proved to be a greenish metal coffer—bronze, I judged—which I estimated to measure some twenty inches long by twelve wide and nine inches deep. And how she rose to the surface weighted with that, passes my understanding. But how she knew it was down there passes my comprehension, too. But then, Heldra Helstrom herself was an enigma.

She re-wrapped herself in her flimsy silken robe of crimson and smiled happily, when she should have been shivering almost to pieces.

"If you'll ship the mast and spread the sail again, Uncle John," she said, surprisingly matter-of-fact now that her errand was successfully accomplished, "we'll go home. I'd like a glass of brandy and a smoke, myself; and I read in your mind that such is your chief desire, at present."

Back at the cottage again, and comfortable once more, Heldra requested me to bear the coffer into her room, which I did. For over an hour she remained in there, then returned to the living room where I sat, and I stared at the picture she presented. If she had always been beautiful, now she was surpassingly glorious.

Instead of the usual crimson robe, her lovely body was sheathed in a sleeveless, sheer, tightly fitting silken slip, cut at the throat in a long sloping V reaching nearly to her waist. The garment was palest sea-green, so flimsy in texture that it might as well have been compounded of mingled moon-mist and cobwebs. Her rosy-pearl flesh gleamed through the fabric with an alluring shimmer which thrilled anew my

jaded old senses at the artistic wonder of her.

A gold collar, gem-studded, unmistakably of ancient Egyptian workmanship, was resting on her superb shoulders—loot of some viking foray into the far Southlands, doubtless. A broad girdle of gold plates, squared, and also gem-studded, was about her sloping hips, and was clasped in front by a broader plate with a sun-emblem in jeweled sets; from which plate or buckle it fell in two broad bands nearly to her white slender feet.

Broad torques of gold on upper arms and about her wrists, and an intricately wrought golden tiara with disks of engraved gold pendent by chains and hanging over her ears, set off her loveliness as never before. Even her red-gold hair, braided in two thick ropes, falling over her breasts to below her waist, were clasped by gem-set brooches of gold.

"Ragnar Wave-Flame's gift to me, O Jarl Wulf," she breathed softly. "Do you like your niece thus arrayed?"

Norse princess out of an elder day, or Norse witch from an even older and wickeder period of the world—whichever this Heldra Helstrom was, of one thing I was certain, no lovelier woman ever lived than this superb being who styled herself my "niece."

And so I told her, and was amply rewarded by the radiance of her smile, and the ecstatic kiss she implanted on my cheek.

Despite her splendid array, she perched on the arm of my chair, and began toying with my left hand. Presently she lifted it to the level of my eyes, laughing softly. I'd felt nothing, yet she'd slipped a broad tarnished silver ring of antique design on my third finger.

"It was yours in the ancient days, O Jarl Wulf," she whispered in her favorite tongue—the archaic form of the Norse language. "Yours again is the ancient ring, now! Ragnar herself carved the mystic runes upon it. Shall I read them, O Jarl, or will you?"

"They are beyond my skill," I confessed. "The words are in the 'secret' language that only the 'Rime-Kanaars' understood. Nor was it well for others than witches and warlocks to seek to understand them."

"Ragnar took that ring from Jarl Wulf's finger ere she set fire to the dragon-ship," Heldra murmured. "Had those runes been on the ring when your foes set upon you —they, not you, would have perished in the sword-play, Jarl Red-Sword!

"But the sea-born witch knew that you would weary of Valhalla in a day to come, and would return to this world of strife and slaying, of loss and grief, of hate and the glutting of vengeance—and, knowing, she carved runes, that in time the charmed ring would return to its proper owner.

"It is her express command that I read them to you, for knowing the runes, never shall water drown or fire burn; nor sword or spear or ax ever wound you, so be it that in time of danger you speak the weird words!

"And for my sake—you who are my 'Uncle John' to all the rest of the world, but to me are dearer than old Jarl Wulf was to Ragnar the sea-witch—I implore you to learn the runic charm, and use it if ever danger menaces. Promise me! Promise me, I say!"

Her silvery voice was vibrant with fierce intensity. She caught my right hand and pressed it against her palpitant body, just beneath her proudly swelling left breast.

"Promise!" she reiterated. "I beg your promise! With your right hand on my heart I adjure you to learn the rune."

"No fool like an old fool," I grumbled, adding a trifle maliciously, "particularly when in the hands of a lovely woman. But such a fuss you make over a few words of outlandish gibberish! Read me the rune, then, witch-maid! I'd learn words worse than those can be to please you and set your mind at rest."

WITH her scarlet lips close to my ear, with bated breath, and in a tone so low I could barely catch her carefully enunciated syllables, she whispered the words. And although her whisper was softer than the sighing of gentlest summer breeze, the tones rang on my inner hearing like strokes of a great war-hammer smiting on a shield of bronze. There was no need to repeat

them—either on her part or mine. There was no likelihood of my ever forgetting that runic charm. I could not, even if I would.

"Surely," I muttered, "you are an adept in the ancient magic. Well for me that you love me, else your witcheries might—"

Most amazingly she laughed a clear, ringing merriment with no trace of the mystic about it.

"Let me show you something—a game, a play; one that will amuse me and entertain you."

She fairly danced across the room and into her own room, emerging with an antique mirror of some burnished, silver-like metal. This she held out to me. I grasped it by its handle obediently enough, humoring this new whim.

"Look into it and say if it is a good mirror," she bade, her sapphire eyes a-dance with elfin mirth.

I looked. All I could see was my same old face, tanned and wrinkled, which I daily saw whenever I shaved or combed my hair, and I told her so. She perched again on the arm of my chair, laid her cheek against mine, and curved her cool arm about my neck.

"Now look again!"

Again the mirror told truth. I saw my face the same as ever, and hers as well, "Like a rose beside a granite boulder," as I assured her.

"You do but see yourself as you think of yourself," she murmured softly, "and me you behold as you believe me to be."

She brought her lips close to the mirror and breathed upon its surface with her warm breath. It clouded over, then cleared. Her voice came, more murmurous than before, but with a definite note of sadness:

"Once more, look! Behold yourself as I see you always; and behold me as I know myself to be! And when I am gone beyond your ken, remember the witch-maid, Heldra, as one woman who loved you, so truly that she showed you herself as she actually was!"

The man's face was still my own, but mine as it was in the days of early manhood, ere life's thunders had graven their scars on brow and cheeks and lips, and before the snows of many winters had whitened my hair.

Her features were no less beautiful, but in her reflected eyes I saw ages and ages of life, and bitter experience, and terrible wisdom that was far more wicked than holy; and it came to me with conviction irrefutable that beside this young-appearing girl, maid, or woman, all my years were but as the span of a puling babe compared to the ageless age of an immortal.

"That, at least, is no *glamyr,*" her voice sighed drearily, heavy with the burden of her own knowledge of herself.

I laid my thick, heavy old arm across her smooth satiny white shoulders, and I turned her head until her sapphire eyes met mine fairly. Very gently I kissed her on her brow.

"Heldra Helstrom," I said, and my voice sounded husky with emotion, "you may be all you have just shown me, or worse! You may be Ragnar Wave-Flame herself, the sea-witch who never dies. You may be even what I sometimes suspect, the empress of Hell, come amongst mortals for no good purpose! But be you what you may, old or young, maid or woman, good or evil, witch, spirit, angel or she-devil, such as you are, you are you and I am I, and for some weird reason we seem to love each other in our own way; so let there be an end to what you are or have been, or who I was in other lives, and content ourselves with what is!"

Were those bright glitters in her sapphire eyes tear-drops ready to fall? If so, I was not sure, for with a cry like that of a lost soul who had found sanctuary, she buried her face on my shoulder. . . .

After a long silence, she slipped from the arm of my chair, and wordlessly, her face averted, she passed into her room. After an hour or so, I went to my own room—but I could not sleep. . . .

Time passed, and I dwelt in a fool's paradise, dreaming that it would last for ever.

THE summer colony began to arrive. There were cottages all along the shore, but there were likewise big estates, whose owners were rated as "somebodies," to put it mildly.

A governor of a great and sovereign

state; an ex-president of our nation; several foreign diplomats and some of their legation attaches—but why enumerate, when one man only concerns this narrative?

Michael Commnenus, tall, slight, dapper, inclined to swarthiness, with black eyes under crescent-curved black eyebrows; with supercilious smiling lips, a trifle too red for a man; with suave Old World manners, and a most amazingly conceited opinion of himself as a Ladycharmer.

It was not his first summer in our midst; and although when he was in Washington at his legation I never gave him a thought, when I saw his too handsome face on the beach, I felt a trifle sick! I knew, positively, that the minute he set eyes on Heldra. . . . Of course I knew, too, that my witch-niece could take care of herself; but just the same, I sensed annoyance, and perhaps, tragedy.

Well, I was in nowise mistaken.

Heldra and I were just about to shove off in my dory for a sail. It was about her chief delight, and mine too, for that matter.

Casually, along strolled Michael Commnenus, twirling a slender stick, caressing a slender black thread he styled a mustache, smiling his approbation of himself. I'd seen that variety of casual approach before. As our flippant young moderns say, it was old stuff.

Out of the corner of my eye I watched. The Don Juan smirk faded when his calculating, appraising eyes met her sapphire orbs, now shining like the never-melting polar ice. An expression of bewilderment spread over his features. His swarthy skin went a sickly greenish-bronze. Involuntarily he crossed himself and passed on. The man was afraid, actually fear-struck!

"Ever see him before, Heldra?" I queried. "He looked at you as if the devil would be a pleasanter sight. That's one man who failed to fall for your vivid beauty, you sea-witch!"

"Who is he?" she asked in a peculiar tone. "I liked his looks even less than he liked mine."

"Michael Commnenus," I informed her, and was about to give her his pedigree as we local people knew him, but was interrupted by her violently explosive:

"Who?"

"Michael Commnenus," I stated again, a trifle testily. "And you needn't shout! What had he done—" but again she interrupted, speaking her archaic Norsk:

"Ho! Varang Chiefs of the Guard Imperial! Thorfinn! Arvid! Sven! And ye who followed them—Gudrun! Randvar! Haakon! Smid! And all ye Varangs in Valhalla, give ear! And ye, O fiends, witches, warlocks, trolls, vampyrs, and all the dark gods who dwell in Hel's halls where the eternal frozen fires blaze without heat, give ear to my voice, and cherish my words, for I give ye all joyous tidings.

"He lives! After all these long centuries Michael Commnenus dwells again on the bosom of fair Earth! In a body of flesh and blood and bone, of nerve and tissue and muscle he lives! He lives, I say! And I have found him!

"Oh, now I know why the Norns who rule all fate sent me to this place. And I shall not fail ye, heroes! Content ye, one and all, I shall not fail!"

Was this the gorgeous beauty I'd learned to love for her gentleness? Hers was the face of a furious female demon for a moment; but then her normal expression returned and she sighed heavily.

"Heed me not, Uncle John," she said drearily. "I did but recall an ancient tale of foul treachery perpetrated on sundry Norsemen in the Varangian Guard of a Byzantine emperor ages agone.

"The niddering—worse than 'coward'—who wrought the bane of some thirty-odd vikings, was a Commnenus, nephew to the Emperor Alexander Commnenus. . . . I live too much in memories of the past, I fear, and for the moment somewhat forgot myself in the hate all good Norse maids should hold toward any who bear the accursed name of the Commneni.

"Still even as I know you to be old Jarl Wulf Red-Brand returned to this world through the gateway of birth—it would be nothing surprising if this spawn of the Commneni were in truth that same Michael Commnenus of whom the tale is told."

"The belief in reincarnation is age-old," I said reflectively. "And in several parts of the world it is a fundamental tenet of religion. If there be truth in the idea, there is,

as you say, nothing surprising if anybody now living should have been anybody else in some former life. . . . And that sample of the Commneni appears quite capable of any treachery that might serve a purpose at the moment! But, Heldra," I implored her, struck by a sudden intuition, "I beg of you not to indulge in any of your deviltries, witcheries, or Norse magic. If this Michael is that other Michael, yet that was long ago; and if he has not already atoned for his sin, you may be very sure that somewhere, sometime, somehow he will atone; so do not worry your regal head about him."

"Spoken like a right Saga-man," she smiled as I finished my brief homily. "I thank you for your words of wisdom. And now, Jarl Wulf Red-Brand, I know you to be fey as well as I am. 'Surely he will atone for his sin' . . . oh! a most comforting thought! So let us think no more about the matter."

I glanced sharply at her. Her too instant acquiescence was suspicious. But her sapphire eyes met mine fairly, smilingly, sending as always a warm glow of contentment through me. So I accepted her assurance as it sounded, and gave myself up to the enjoyment of the sail and the sound of her silvery voice as she sang an old English love ballad I'd known as a young man. And under the spell of her magnetic personality gradually the episode of Michael Commnenus faded into nothingness—for a while.

A COUPLE of days later, just about dark, Heldra came down the stairs from the attic, where she'd been rummaging. In her hand she carried an old violin-case. I looked and grinned ruefully.

"You are a bad old Uncle John," she scolded. "Why did you not tell me you played the 'fidel,' even as Jarl Wulf played one in his time? Think of all the sweet music you might have made in the past winter nights, and think of the dances I might have danced for your delight while you played—even as Ragnar danced for her old Jarl."

"But I did not tell you that I played a fiddle—because I don't," I stated flatly. "That is a memento of an absurd ambition I once cherished, but which died a-borning. I tried to learn the thing, but the noises I extracted were so abominable that I quit before I'd fairly got started."

"You are teasing," she retorted, her eyes sparkling with mischief. "But I am not to be put off thus easily. Tonight you will play, and I will dance—such a dance as you have never beheld even when you were Jarl Wulf."

"If I try to play that thing," I assured her seriously, "you'll have a time dancing to my discords, you gorgeous tease!"

"We'll see," she nodded. "But even as my magic revealed to me the whereabouts of the 'fidel' so my spirit tells me that you play splendidly."

"Your 'magic' may be all right, but your 'spirit' has certainly misinformed you," I growled.

"My spirit has never yet lied to me—nor has it done so this time." Her tone was grave, yet therein was a lurking mockery; and I became a trifle provoked.

"All right," I assented grouchily. "Whenever you feel like hearing me 'play,' I'll do it. And you'll never want to listen to such noises again."

She went into her room laughing sweetly, and took the fiddle with her.

AFTER supper she said nothing about me playing that old fiddle, and I fatuously thought she'd let the matter drop. But about ten o'clock she went to her room without a word. She emerged after a bit, wearing naught but a sheer loose palest blue silk robe, held at the waist only by a tiny jeweled gold filligree clasp. Loose as the robe was, it clung lovingly to her every curve as if caressing the beauteous, statuesque body it could not and would not conceal.

She was totally devoid of all ornament save that tiny brooch, and her wondrous fiery-gold hair was wholly unconfined, falling below her waist in a cascade of shimmering sunset hues, against which her rose-pearl body gleamed through the filmy gossamer-like robe.

Again she sat and talked for a while. But along toward midnight she broke a short silence with:

"I'll be back in a minute. I wish to prepare for my dancing."

From her room she brought four antique bronze lamps and a strangely shaped urn of oil. She filled the lamps and placed one at each corner of the living room, on the floor.

Back into her room she went, and out again with an octagonal-shaped stone, flat on both sides, about an inch thick, and some four inches across. This she placed on the low taboret whereon I usually kept my nargilyeh. She propped up that slab of stone as if placing a mirror—which I decided it couldn't very well be, as it did not even reflect light but seemed as dull as a slab of slate.

As a final touch, she brought out that confounded old fiddle! And on her scarlet lips was a smile that a seraph might have envied, so innocent and devoid of guile it seemed.

"What's this?" I demanded—as if I didn't know!

"Your little 'fidel' with which you will make for your Heldra such a rapturous music," she smiled caressingly.

"Um-m-m-m!" I grunted. "And what are those lamps for—and that ugly slab of black rock?"

"That black slab is a 'Hel-stone,' having the property of reflecting whatever is directly before it, if illumined by those four lamps placed at certain angles; and later it will give off those same reflections—even as the stuff called luminous calcium sulfide absorbs light-rays until surcharged, and then emits them, when properly exposed. So, you see, we can preserve the picture of my dance."

"Heldra," I demanded sharply, "are you up to some devilishness? All this looks amazingly like the stage-setting for witch-working!"

"I have sung for you, on different nights," she replied in gentlest reproach, "and have told old tales, and have attired myself again and again for your pleasure in beholding me. Have all these things ever bewitched you, or harmed anyone? How, then, can the fact of my dancing for my own satisfaction, before the mystic Hel-stone, do any harm?"

As ever, she won. Her sapphire orbs did queer things to me whenever they looked into my own gray, faded old eyes—trembling me to understand and approve whatever she did, simply because she was she and I was I.

"All right," I said. "But you're making a fool of me—insisting that I play this old fiddle. Well—I'll teach you a lesson!" And I drew the bow over the strings with a most appalling wail.

AND with the unexpected swiftness of a steel trap closing on its victim, icy fingers locked about my wrist, and I knew very definitely that another and alien personality was guiding my arm and fingers! But there came likewise a swift certitude that if I behaved, no harm would ensue—to me, at least. So I let the thing have its way—and listened to such music as I had not believed could be played on any instrument devised by a mortal.

I wish that I could describe that music, but I do not know the right words. I doubt if they have been invented. It was wild, barbaric, savage, but likewise it was alluring, seductive, stealing away all inhibitions—too much of it would have corrupted the angels in heaven. I was almost in a stupor, intoxicated, like a hasheesh-eater in a drugged dream, spellbound, unable to break from the thralldom holding my will, drowning in rapture well-nigh unbearable.

Heldra suddenly blew out the big kerosene lamp standing on the table, leaving as sole illumination the rays from those four bronze lights, standing in the corners.

Her superb body moved gracefully, slowly at first, then faster, into the intricate figure and pattern of a dance that was old when the world was young. . . .

With inward horror I knew the why and wherefore of that entire ceremonial; knew I'd been be-cozened and be-japed; yet knew, likewise, that it was too late for interference. I could not even speak. I could but watch, while some personality alien to my body played maddeningly on my fiddle, and the "niece" I loved danced a dance deliberately planned to seduce a man who hated and feared the dancer—and for what devilish purpose I could well guess!

I saw the light-rays converge on her alluring, statuesque body, saw them apparently pass through her and impinge on the surface of that black, sullen, octagonal Hel-stone, and be greedily swallowed up, until the dull, black surface glowed like a rare black Australian opal; and ever the dancing of the witch-girl grew more alluring, more seductive, more abandoned. And I knew why Heldra was thus shamefully—shamelessly, rather—conducting! She had read Michael Commnenus his character very accurately; knew that his soul had recognized her hatred for him, and feared her—and that her one chance to get him in her clutches lay in inflaming his senses . . . and she'd even told me the properties of that most damnable Hel-stone!

Wilder and faster came the music, and swifter and still more alluring grew the rhythmic response as Heldra's lovely body swayed and spun and swooped and postured; until ultimately her waving arms brought her fluttering hands, in the briefest of touches, into contact with the tiny brooch at her waist and the filmy robe was swept away in a single gesture that was faithfully recorded on the sullen surface of the Hel-stone.

Instantly the dancer stopped as if petrified, her arms outstretched as in invitation, her regal head thrown back, showing the long smooth white column of her throat, her clear, half-closed, sapphireblue eyes agleam with subtle challenge. . . .

The uncanny music died in a single sighing, sobbing whisper, poisonsweet . . . the clutching, icy fingers were gone from my wrist . . . my first coherent thought was: Had that spell been directed at me, the old adage anent "old fools" would have been swiftly justified!

And I knew that to all intents and purposes, Michael Commnenus was sunk!

Just the same, I was furious. Heldra had gone too far, and I told her so, flatly. I pointed out in terms unmistakable that what she planned was murder, or worse, and that this was modern America wherein witchcraft had neither place nor sanction, and that I'd be no accessory to any such devilishness as she was contriving. Oh, oh, I made myself and my meaning plain.

Her voice genuinely regretful, in her eyes was a light of sincere love. She came to me and wrapped her white arms about my neck, murmuring terms of affectionate consolation.

"Poor dear Uncle John! Heldra was thoughtless—wicked me! And I might have involved you in serious trouble? I am ashamed! But the fate laid upon me by the Norms is heavy, and I may not evade it, even for you, whom I love. Tell me," she demanded suddenly, "if I should destroy the vile earthworm without any suspicion attaching to you, or to me, would you love me as before, even knowing what I had done?"

"No!" I fairly snarled the denial. I wanted it to be emphatic.

She smiled serenely, and kissed me full on my lips.

"I never thought to thank a mortal for lying to me, but now I do! Deep in your heart I can read your true feeling, and I am glad! But now"—and her tone took on a sadness most desolate—"I regret to say that on the morrow I leave you. The lovely garments you gave me, and the trunks containing them I take with me, as you would not wish that I go emptyhanded. Nor will I insult you, O Jarl Wulf, by talk of payment.

"When I am gone, you will just casually mention that I have returned to my home, and the local gossips will not suspect aught untoward. And soon I shall be forgotten, and no one will suspect, or possibly connect you, or me, with what inevitably must happen to that spawn of the Commneni.

"But of this be very sure: Somewhere, sometime, you and I shall be together again . . ." Her voice broke, she kissed me fiercely on the lips, then tenderly on both cheeks, then lastly, with a queer reverence, on my furrowed old brow. Then she turned, went straight to her room, shut the door, and I heard the click of the key as she locked herself in, for the first time during the stay in my house. . . .

NEXT morning, as she'd planned, she departed on the first train cityward. I given her money enough for all her requirements—more, indeed, than she was

willing to take at first, declaring that she intended selling some few of her jewels.

And with her departure went all which made life worth living. . . .

Heavily I dragged my reluctant feet back to the empty shell of a cottage which until then had been an earthly paradise to an old man—and the very first thing I laid eyes on was that accursed Hel-stone, lying on the living room table.

I picked it up, half minded to shatter it to fragments, but an idea seized me. I bore it down-cellar, where semi-darkness prevailed, and the Hel-stone glowed softly with its witch-light, showing me the loveliness of her who had departed from me. And I pressed the cold octagon to my lips, thankful that she'd left me the thing as a feeble substitute for her presence. Then I turned and went back upstairs, found an old ivory box of Chinese workmanship, and placed the Hel-stone therein, very carefully, as a thing—priceless.

I went to bed early that night. There was no reason to sit up. But I could not sleep. I lay there in my bed, cursing the entire line of Commneni, root, trunk and branch, from the first of that ilk whom history records to this latest scion, or "spawn," as Heldra had termed him.

Around midnight, being still wakeful, I arose, got the Hel-stone and sat in the darkness—and gradually became aware that I was not alone! Looking up, I saw her I'd lost standing in a witch-glow of phosphorescent light. I knew at once that it was not Heldra in person, but her "scinlacca" or "shining double," a "sending," and that it was another of her witcheries.

"But even this is welcome," I thought. Then I felt her thought expressed through that phantasmal semblance of her own gorgeous self—and promptly strove, angrily, to resist her command. Much good it did me!

Utterly helpless, yet fully cognizant of my actions, but oddly assured that about me was a cloak of invisibility—the "glamyr" of the ancient Alrunas—I dressed, took the Hel-stone, and pressed out into the night.

Straight to the cottage of Commnenus I went, pawed about under the doorstep, and planted there the Hel-stone then; still secure in the mystic glamor, I returned to my own abode.

And no sooner had I seated myself in my chair for a smoke, than I realized fully the utter devilishness of that witch from out the wintry seas whom I had taken into my home and had sponsored as my "niece" in the eyes of the world.

Right then I decided to go back and get that Hel-stone, and smash it—and couldn't do it! I got sleepy so suddenly that I awoke to find that it was broad daylight, and nine-thirty a.m. And from then on, as regularly as twilight came, I could only stay awake so long as I kept my thoughts away from that accursed Hel-stone; wherefore I determined that the thing could stay where it was until it rotted, for all me!

Then Commnenus came along the beach late one afternoon. He raised his hat in his Old World, courtly fashion, and tried to make some small talk. I grunted churlishly and ignored him. But finally he came out bluntly with:

"Professor Craig, I know your opinion of me, and admit it is to some extent justifiable. I seem to have acquired the reputation of being a Don Juan. But I ask you to believe that I bitterly regret that—now! Yet, despite that reputation, I'd like to ask you a most natural question, if I may."

I nodded assent, unprepared for what was coming, yet somehow assured it would concern Heldra. Nor was I at all disappointed, for he fairly blurted out:

"When do you expect Miss Helstrom to return, if at all?"

I was flabbergasted! That is the only word adequate. I glared at him in a black fury. When I could catch my breath I demanded:

"How did even you summon up the infernal gall to ask me that?"

His reply finished flattening me out.

"Because I love her! Wait"—he begged—"and hear me out, please! Even a criminal is allowed that courtesy." Then as I nodded grudgingly, he resumed:

"The first time I saw her, something deep within me shrank away from her with repulsion. Still, I admired her matchless beauty. But of late, since her departure,

there is not a night I do not see her in my mind's eye, and I know that I love her, and hope that she will return; hence my query.

"I will be frank—I even hope that she noticed me and read my admiration without dislike. Perhaps two minds can reach each other—sometimes. For invariably I see her with head thrown back, her eyes half closed, and her arms held out as if calling me to come to her. And if I knew her whereabouts I'd most certainly go, nor would I be 'trifling,' where she is concerned. I want to win her, if possible, as my wife; and an emperor should be proud to call her that—"

"Very romantic," I sneered. "But, Mr. Woman-Chaser, I cut my eye-teeth a long while before you were born, and I'm not so easily taken in. The whereabouts of my niece is no concern of yours. So get away from me before I lose my temper, or I'll not be answerable for my actions. Get!"

He went! The expression of my face and the rage in my eyes must have warned him that I was in a killing humor. Well, I was. But likewise, I was sick with fear. What he'd just told me was sufficient to sicken me—the Hel-stone had gotten in its damnable work. My very soul was aghast as it envisioned the inevitable consequences. . . .

An idea obsessed me, and I needed the shades of night to cloak my purpose.

AIMLESSLY I wandered from room to room in my cottage, and finally drifted into the room which had been Heldra's. Still aimlessly I pulled open drawer after drawer in the dresser, and in the lowest one I heard a faint metallic clink.

The four antique bronze lamps were there. I shrewdly suspected she had left them there as means of establishing contact with her, should need arise. I examined them, and found, as I'd hoped, that they were filled.

Around ten o'clock I placed those lamps in the four corners of the living room, and lighted them, precisely as I'd seen Heldra do. Then I tried my talents at making an invocation.

"Heldra! Heldra! Heldra!" I called. "I, John Craig, who gave you shelter at your need, call to you now, wheresoever you be, to come to me at my need!"

The four lights went out, yet not a breath of air stirred in the room. A faintly luminous glow, the witch-light, ensued; and there she stood, or rather, the scin-laecca, her shining double! But I knew that anything I might say to it would be the same as if she were there in the flesh.

"Heldra," I beseeched that witchlighted simulacrum, "by the love you gave me, as Ragnar loved Jarl Wulf Red-Sword, I ask that you again enshroud me with the mantle of invisibility, the 'glamyr,' and allow me to lift that accursed Hel-stone from where you compelled me to conceal it. Let me return it to you, at any place you may appoint, so that it can do no more harm.

"Already that poor bewitched fool is madly in love with you, because the radiations of that enchanted stone have saturated him every time he put foot on the doorstep beneath which I buried it!

"Heldra, grant me this one kindness, and I will condone all sins you ever did in all your witch-life."

The shining wraith nodded slowly, unmistakably assenting to my request. As from a far distance I heard a faint whisper:

"Since it is your desire, get the Hel-stone, and bear it yourself to the sea-cave at the foot of the great cliff guarding the north passage into the harbor. Once you have borne it there, its work, and yours, are done.

"And I thank you for saying that you will condone all I have ever done, for the burden of the past is heavy, and your words have made it easier to bear."

The shining wraith vanished, and I went forth into the darkness. Straight to the house where I'd hidden the Hel-stone I betook myself, felt under the step, found what I sought, took it with an inward prayer of gratitude that because of Heldra's "glamyr" I had not been caught at something questionable in appearance, and started up the beach.

THE tide was nearly out; so I walked rapidly, as I had some distance to go, and the sea-cave Heldra had designated

(*Continued on page* 89)

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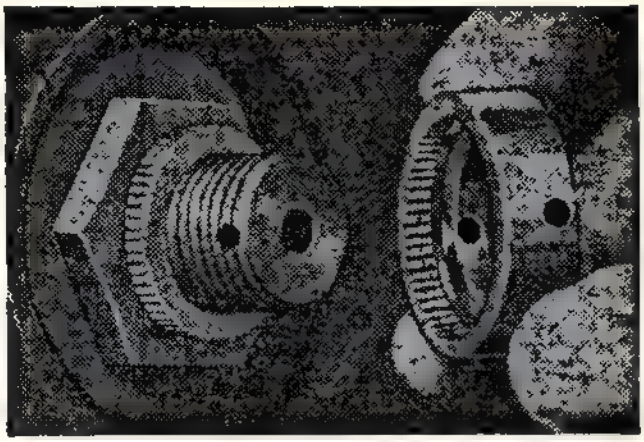

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L'AFFAIRE VERENEKIN

(*Continued from page* 11)

"As I was leaving, somewhat abruptly, I passed the boy's funeral procession. Flowers, mourners, priest—everything. A most convincing performance. Even the mother in tears.

"My chance to compliment her on her thoroughness did not come for many years. When we met here in Paris I asked after her son, but she burst into tears.

" 'You must know he is dead, Nicolai', she told me, and sobbed.

"When I showed surprise, she reminded me that my own squad had shot him. 'I buried him that very afternoon,' she told me. 'Within the hour'." The Colonel looked off into the haze, lost in his memories.

"Finally," said the Colonel slowly, "I realized what had occurred. That Lieutenant," he said, slapping his glass down on the bar, "that filthy dog of a lieutenant," the Colonel spat out. "He took the money from the woman's jewels and got drunk. Stinking drunk." The Colonel's eyes blazed up for a second and his fist clenched around the glass. Then the anger ebbed from his face and he relaxed.

"The Lieutenant," he said tonelessly, "never told the mother of our plot." The Colonel looked up at me and smiled faintly with one corner of his mouth.

"She buried her son alive," he said quietly, carefully pouring himself another Cognac.

THE SEA WITCH

(*Continued from page 86*)

could not be entered at high tide, although once within, one was safe enough and could leave when the entrance was once more exposed.

I entered the cave believing that I'd promptly be rid of the entire mess, once and for all. But there was no one there, and the interior of the cave was as dark as Erebus. I lit a match, and saw nothing. The match burned out. I fumbled for another—a dazzling ray from a flashlight blinded me for a moment, then left my face and swept the cave. A hated voice, suave yet menacing, said:

"Well, Professor Craig, you may now hand me whatever it was that you purloined from under my doorstep!"

An extremely business-like automatic pistol was aimed in the exact direction of my solar plexus—and the speaker was none other than Michael Commnenus!

Very evidently the mystic "glamyr" had failed to work that time. And I was in a rather nasty predicament.

Then, abruptly, Heldra came! She looked like an avenging fury, emerging out of nowhere, apparently, and the tables were turned. She wore a dark cloak or long mantle draped over her head and falling to her feet.

Her right hand was outstretched, and with her left hand she seized the Hel-stone from my grasp. She pointed one finger at Commnenus, and did not even touch him; yet had she smote with an ancient war-hammer the effect would have been the same.

"You dog, and son of a long line of dogs!" her icy voice rang with excoriating virulence. "Drop that silly pistol! Drop it, I say!"

A faint blue flicker snapped from her extended finger—the pistol fell from a flaccid hand. Commnenus seemed totally paralyzed. Heldra's magic held him completely in thralldom. . . . I snapped into activity and scooped up the gun.

"Followed me, did you?" I snarled. "I'll—"

"Wait, Jarl Wulf!" Heldra's tone was frankly amused. "No need for you to do aught! Mine is the blood-feud, mine the blood-right! And ere I finish with you Michael Commnenus, an ancient hate will be surfeited, and an ancient vengeance, too long delayed, will be consummated."

"Heldra," I began, for dread seized me at the ominous quality of her words, "I will not stand for this affair going any farther! I—"

"Be silent! Seat yourself over there against the wall and watch and hear, but move not nor speak again, lest I silence you for ever!"

A force irresistible hurled me across the cave and set me down, hard, on a flat rock. I realized fully that I was obeying her mandate—I couldn't speak, couldn't even move my eyelids, so thoroughly had she inhibited any further interference on my part.

Paying no further attention to Commnenus for the moment, she crossed over to me, bent and kissed me on my lips, her sapphire eyes laughing into my own blazing, wrathful eyes.

"Poor dear! It is too bad, but you made me do it. I wanted you to help me all the way through this tangled coil—but you have been so difficult to manage! Yet in some ways you have played into my hands splendidly. Yes, even to bringing the Hel-stone back to me—and I would not care to lose that for a king's ransom. And I put it into yon fool's head to be wakeful tonight, and see you regain the Hel-stone, and follow you—and thus walk into my nice little trap.

"And now!"

She whirled and faced Commnenus. And for all that he was spellbound, in his eyes I read fear and a ghastly foreknowledge of some dreadful fate about to be meted out to him at her hands.

She picked up the flashlight he had dropped and extinguished it with the dry comment:

"We need a different light here—the Hel-light from Hela's halls!" And at her word, a most peculiar light pervaded the cave, and there was that about its luminance that actually affrighted. Again she spoke:

"Michael Commnenus, you utterly vile

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worm of the earth! You know that your doom is upon you—but as yet you know not why. O beast lower than the swine! Harken and remember my words even after eternity is swallowed up in the Twilight of the Gods! You are a modern, and know not that the self, the soul, is eternal, undying, changing its body and name in every clime and period, yet ever the same, soul, responsible for the deeds of its bodies. You have even prated of your soul—when in fact, you are the property of the soul!

"Watch, now!" She pointed to the cave entrance. "Behold there the wisps of sea-fog gathering; and gradually will come the rising tide. And on the curtain of that cold, swirling mist, behold the pictures of the past—a past centuries old; a past wherein your craven, treacherous soul sinned beyond all pardon!

"Look you, too, Jarl Wulf Red-Brand, so that in all the days remaining to you upon Earth, you may know that his doom was just, and that Heldra is but executing a merited penalty!

"And while the shuttles of the Norns weave the tapestry of the sin of this Commnenus, I will tell all the tale of his crimes.

"In Byzantium reigned the emperor, Alexander Commnenus. Secure on his throne, guarded by the ponderous axes and the long swords of the Varangians, the splendid sons of the Norse-lands, who had gone a-viking. Trusted and loved were the Varangs by the emperor, and oft he boasted of their fidelity, swearing on the cross of Constantine that to the last man would his Varangs perish ere one would flinch a step from overwhelming foes, citing in proof their battle-cry:

" 'Valhalla! Valhalla! Victory or Valhalla!'

"Into the harbor of the Golden Horn sailed the viking long-ship, the *Grettir*. Three noble brothers owned her—Thorfinn, Arvid, Sven. With them sailed their sister . . . her fame as an Alruna-maid, prophetess and priestess, was sung throughout the Norse lands. No man so low but bore her reverence. Sin it was to cast eyes of desire on any Alruna, and the sister of the three brothers was held especially holy.

"Between the hands of the Emperor

Alexander Commnenus, the three brethren placed their hands, swearing fealty for a year and a day. Thirty fighting-men, their crew, followed wherever the three brothers led. And the great emperor, hearing of their war-fame from others of the Varangian guard, gave the brothers high place in his esteem, and held them nigh his own person.

"Their sister, the Alruna-maid, was treated as became her rank and holy repute. Aye! Even in Christian Byzantium respect and honor were shown her by the priests of an alien belief. But one man in Byzantium aspired more greatly than any other, Norseman or Byzantine, had ever dared.

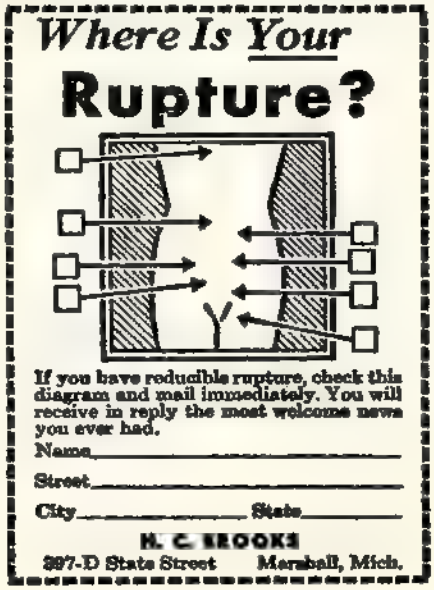
"A Commnenus he, grand admiral of Byzantium's war fleet, nephew to the emperor, enjoying to the full the confidence and love of his imperial uncle. Notorious for his profligacy, he cast his libertine eyes on the Norse Alruna-maid, but with no thought of making her his wife. Nay! 'Twas only as his leman he desired her. . . . So, he plotted. . . .

"The three brothers, Thorfinn, Arvid, Sven, with their full crew, in the long ship *Grettir* were ordered to sea to cruise against certain pirates harrying a portion of the emperor's coasts.

"Every man of the *Grettir's* crew died the deaths of rats—poison in the water-casks! . . . They died as no Norseman should die, brutes' deaths, unfit for Valhalla and the company of heroes who had passed in battle! And their splendid bodies, warped and distorted by pangs of the poison, were cast overside as prey for sharks, by two creatures of this grand admiral, whom he had sent with the three brothers as pilots knowing the coast. They placed the drug in the casks, they flung over the dead and dying, they ran the *Grettir* aground and set fire to her—but his was the command—and his the crime!"

AND as Heldra told the tale, in a voice whose dreary tones made the recital seem even worse—the watching Commnenus and I saw clearly depicted on the curtain of the mist, each separate incident. . . . Heldra turned to the wildly glaring Michael.

"There was but one person in all Byzan-



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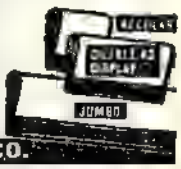

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tium who knew the truth," she screamed in sudden frenzy. "I give back for a moment your power of speech. Say, O fool! Coward! Niddering! Who am I?"

Abruptly she tore off the somber cloak and stood in all her loveliness, enhanced by every ornament she once had worn for my pleasure of beholding her thus arrayed.

A cry of unearthly terror broke from the staring Commnenus. His voice was a strangled croak as he gasped:

"The Alruna-maid, Heldra! The red-haired sea-witch—sister to the three brothers, Thorfinn, Arvid, Sven!"

"Aye, you foul dog! And me you took at night, after they sailed away, and me you shut up where my cries for aid could not be heard; and me you would have despoiled—me, the Alruna-maid, sworn to chastity!

"Yet I escaped from that last dreadful dungeon wherein you immured me—how?

"By that magic known to such as I, I called upon the empress of the Underworld, Hela herself, and pledged her my service in return for indefinitely continued life, until I could repay you and avenge the heroes denied the joys of Valhalla—by you!

"And now—comes swiftly the doom I have planned for you . . . you who now remember!"

Heldra spoke truly. Swiftly it came! Sitting where I was, I saw it plainly, a great dragon-ship with round shields displayed along her gunwales, with a big square sail of crimson embroidered in gold, with long oars dipping and lifting in unison to the time-beat rowing-song of the ancient vikings!

Straight to the mouth of the cave came the ghost-ship, and its crew disembarked and entered. Heldra cried out in joyous welcome:

"Even from out of the deeps, ye heroes, one and all, have ye heard my silent summons, and obeyed the voice of your Alruna from old time! Now your waiting is at an end!

"Yonder stands the Commnenus. That other concerns ye not—but mark him well, for in a former life he was Jarl Wulf Red-Brand! See, on his left hand is still the old silver ring with its runes of Ragnar Wave-Flame!"

The ghost-vikings turned their dead eyes on me with a curious fixity. One and all, they saluted. Evidently, Jarl Wulf must have been somebody, in his time. Then ignoring me, they turned to Heldra, awaiting her further commands. Commnenus they looked at, fiercely, avidly.

Heldra's voice came, heavily, solemnly, with a curious bell-like tone sounding the knell of doom incarnate:

"Michael Commnenus! This your body present has never wrought me harm, nor has it harmed any of these. It is not with your body that we hold our feud. Wherefore, your body shall go forth from this cave as it entered—as handsome as ever, bearing no mark of scathe.

"But your niddering soul, O most accursed, shall be drawn from out its earthly tenement this night and given over to these souls you wronged, who now await their victim and their vengeance! And I tell you, Michael Commnenus, that what they have in store for you will make the Hades of your religion seem as a devoutly-to-be-desired paradise!"

Heldra stepped directly before Commnenus. Her shapely white arms were outstretched, palms down, fingers stiffly extended. A queer, violet-tinged radiance streamed from her fingers, gradually enveloping Commnenus—he began to glow, as if he had been immersed and had absorbed all his body could take up. . . .

Heldra's voice took on the tone of finality:

"Michael Commnenus! Thou accursed soul, by the power I hold, given me by Hela's self, I call you forth from your hiding-place of flesh—come ye out!"

The living body never moved, but from out its mouth emerged a faint silvery-tinted vapor flowing toward the Alruna-maid, and as it came, the violet glow diminished. The accumulating silvery mist swirled and writhed, perceptibly taking on the semblance of the body from whence it was being extracted. There remained finally but a merest thread of silvery shimmer connecting soul and body. Heldra spoke beneath her breath:

"One of you hew that cord asunder!"

A double-bladed Norse battle-ax whirled

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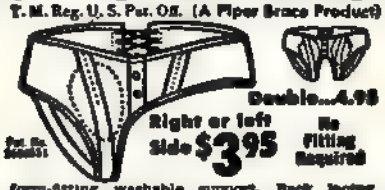

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and a ghostly voice croaked: "Thor Hulf!"

Thor, the old Norse war-god, must have helped, for the great ghost-ax evidently encountered a solid cable well-nigh as strong as tempered steal. Thrice the ax rose and fell, driven by the swelling thews of the towering giant wielding it, ere the silver cord was broken by the blade.

A tittering giggle burst from the lips of the present-day Michael Commnenus.

I realized with a sudden sickness at the pit of my stomach that an utterly mindless imbecile stood there, grinning vacuously!

"That Thing," Heldra said, coldly scornful as she pointed to the silvery shining soul, "is yours, heroes! Do with it as ye will!"

Two of the gigantic wraiths clamped their great hands on its shoulders. It turned a dull leaden-gray, the color of abject fear. Cringing and squirming, it was hustled aboard the ghostly dragon-ship. The other ghost-vikings went aboard, taking their places at the oars . . . yet they waited. Heldra turned to me.

"Be free of the spell I laid upon you!" Her tone was as gentle as it had been in her sweetest moment while she dwelt in my home as my niece.

I gasped, rose and stretched. I wanted to be angry—and dared not. I'd seen too much of her hellish powers to risk incurring her displeasure. And reading my mind, she laughed merrily.

THEN her cool, soft, white arms went about my neck, her wondrous sapphire eyes looked long and tenderly into mine—and I will not write the message I read in those softly shining orbs. Once again her silvery voice spoke:

"Jarl Wulf Red-Brand! John Craig! I am the grand-daughter of Ragnar Wave-Flame! And once I went a-viking with my three brothers, to far Byzantium. You know that tale. Now, once I said that Ragnar Wave-Flame never died. Also, I said that I had dived into her sea-cave and lain in her arm—and now I tell you the rest of that mystery: with her breath she entered this my body where ever since we have dwelt as one soul. I needed aid in seeking my vengeance, for it was after I'd escaped the

clutches of the Commnenus, and had passed through adventures incredible while making my way back to the Norse-lands—and my spirit was very bitter. And when I sought her council, Ragnar helped me. . . .

"This now do I ask of you: Do you, as I have sometimes thought, love me as a man loves a maid? Reflect well, ere you answer, and recall what I once showed you in a mirror—I am older than you! So, knowing that, despite my witcheries of the long, bitter past, and those of tonight, would you take me, were you and I young once more?"

"By all the gods in Valhalla, and by all the devils in Hela's halls: yes!" My reply was given without need of reflecting, or counting cost.

"Then, in a day to come, you shall take me—I swear it!"

FULL upon my mouth she pressed her scarlet lips, and a surging flame suffused my entire body. Yet it was life—not death. Against my chest I felt the pressure of her swelling breasts, and fires undreamable streamed from her heart to mine. Time itself stood still. After an eon or so she unwound her clinging arms from about my neck and turned away, and with never a backward glance she entered that waiting, ghostly dragon-ship. The oars dipped. . . .

I left the cave.

The driveling idiot who had been Michael Commnenus was already gone. Later, the gossip ran that he'd "lost his mind," and that his embassy had returned him to his own land. None ever suspected, or coupled me or my "niece" with his affliction. And he himself had absolutely no memory—had lost even his own name when his soul departed!

But within a month, I sold my cottage, packed and stored all my belongings until I could find a new location, where I'd be totally unknown; and then I went away from where I had dwelt for years—and with urgent reason.

The fire with which Heldra had imbued me from her breath and breast was renewing my youth! My hair was shades darker, my wrinkles almost gone; my step was brisker, I looked to be nearer forty than almost sixty. So marked was the change that the villagers stared openly at what seemed at least a miracle . . . tongues were wagging . . . old superstitions were being revived and dark hints were being bandied about.

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. . . So I finally decided to leave, and go where my altered appearance would cause no comment.

I wonder if—

THE EYRIE

(*Continued from page* 8)

The Editor, WEIRD TALES
9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20, N. Y.

Well, I think since I am one of the oldest readers of WEIRD TALES *I shall at last write and get in my two cents worth.*

I read the first issue of WEIRD TALES, *I believe in 1925, and I have only missed one copy that I can remember, so believe me I have quite a collection of WT magazines. First off, I don't like the size of them now. The first issues were large and had much more reading than now, also I like the stories kept on the weird line. The heck with this Scientific reading! I say keep* WEIRD TALES *weird. Also what ever happened to the true experience department that used to be in* WEIRD TALES, *a department where folks could write their true experiences? That was a fine department, and I for one would like to have it back.*

Mrs. J. F. Post,
West Asheville, N. C.

The Editor, WEIRD TALES
9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20, N. Y.

I read five or six different publications each month, but the one magazine I am always waiting for is WEIRD TALES. *It's been my favorite for quite a while and I always have been fickle when it came to reading habits. This is different and I hope it always will be.*

Edward Kisch,
Simi, California

▶ Space does not permit in this issue for us to use any of the letters which we received on the subject of an exchange mart for old issues of WEIRD TALES. We hope to pass on various ideas in our next issue.

▶ This issue, by the way, will be the first in our small handy size; it will be easier to read, convenient to carry and—as always in the past—full of the best in fantasy fiction. The Editor, WEIRD TALES.

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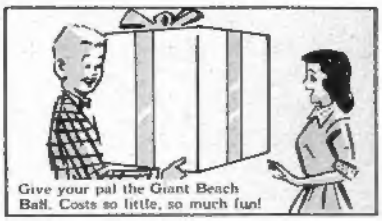

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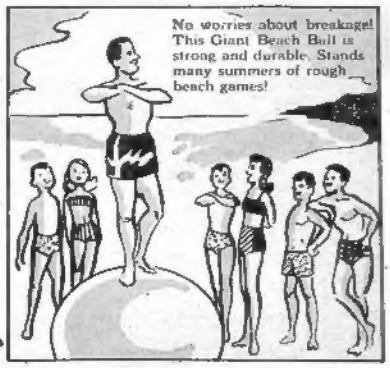

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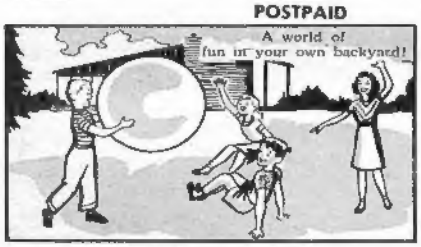

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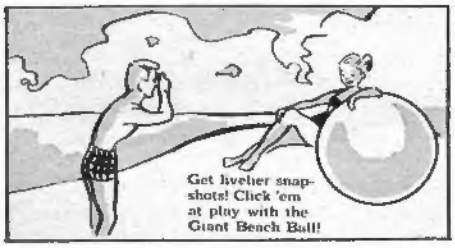

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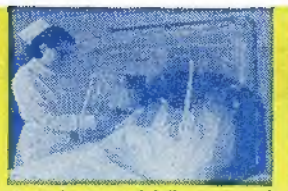
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